

The Golden Amazon Returns By THORNTON
AYRE

fantastic

ADVENTURES

JANUARY
20c



RICHARD O.
LEWIS
★
EDMOND
HAMILTON
★
ROSS
ROCKLYNNE
★
WILLIAM P.
McGIVERN

The
**FLOATING
ROBOT**

By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

VOLUME 3
NUMBER 1

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

JANUARY
1941

Let me help you give fine
I'll trust you - I'll give you
10 MONTHS to Pay

GIFTS

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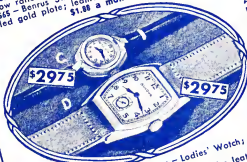


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(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)



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ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3
NO. 1

Contents for January, 1941

STORIES

- THE FLOATING ROBOT (Complete Novel) by David Wright O'Brien . . . 10
What was this fantastic creature that Sally O'Neill's voice summoned out of another dimension?
- THE DYNAMOUSE (Novelet) by Wm. P. McGivern 46
A mouse, a piece of cheese, a bit of U-235—and potent disaster threatened the city of Chicago!
- THE VANISHING WITNESSES (Short) by Ross Rocklynn 62
They vanished, these key State witnesses, into a weird world where the sun traveled too fast!
- THE GOLDEN AMAZON RETURNS
(Novelet) by Thornton Ayre 78
Children of the Amazon they were, and the one thing that could send her once more into battle.
- DR. KELTON—BODY SNATCHER (Short) . by Richard O. Lewis 98
Sometimes a goal attained is a goal regretted. And so it was with Dr. Kelton and his stolen body.
- THE HORSE THAT TALKED (Novelet) by Edmond Hamilton 108
China Boy was a racehorse—by his own admission. But maybe China Boy was a bit inclined to boast—

FEATURES

- The Editor's Notebook 7 Introducing the Author 132
- Our Lord, The Sun 44 Quiz Page 134
- Fantastic Hoaxes 76 Reader's Page 136
- Romance of the Elements 97 Correspondence Corner 145

Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, symbolic of the story "The Floating Robot."
Illustrations by H. W. McCauley, Jay Jackson, Robert Fuqua, Julian S. Krupa, R. Newman, Dick Shaw.

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FANTASTIC
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JANUARY 1941

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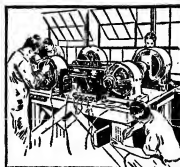
VOLUME 3,
NUMBER 1

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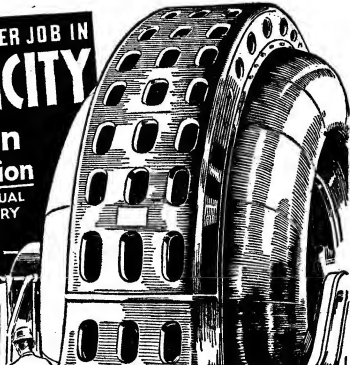
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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

GETTING this issue of *Fantastic Adventures* ready has been a fantastic adventure in itself. In the first place, as you've no doubt noticed, we've re-dated the magazine, so that the new year begins with January, rather than February, and that our forecast story by Eando Binder, "The Invisible Robinhood Returns" has been scheduled for later appearance.

In its place we have a grand new story by David Wright O'Brien, written after an inspiration by artist H. W. McCauley, who worked with this author on "The Floating Robot." Thus, your editor was almost tearing his hair out when deadline came, and story and cover had not yet become the related and fascinating unit they now are.

However, we think you'll agree that this novel experiment has resulted in the most unusual fantasy in many months, and in the finest painting McCauley has yet turned out. In fact, we are convinced that McCauley's creations have now stamped him as the finest artist fantasy has ever seen.

THEN, to make your editor still more of a madman, our effort to bring back Ross Rocklynne resulted in another master-short, but only after the hottest argument and "revision" session your editors have indulged in in many a day. Anyway, the story just made the deadline, and we're glad it did, because here's a short with real punch!

RECENTLY a reader dropped us a postcard. He asks: "Will there be a science fiction convention in 1941?" Well, there's a question that needs a little answering. On September 1 and 2 there was one here in Chicago, at which it was decided another was in order. 1941's site was selected by unanimous assent at the official business meeting, and was announced as Denver.

So, the answer is yes. There will be a convention, and at Denver. But the other day we re-

ceived word that the site was Jersey City.

According to officials, this has been circulated, but is untrue. And Convention Chairman Olon F. Wiggins has set us straight. So, if you readers are planning on attending the next World Science Fiction Convention, it's the Denver, and *Fantastic Adventures* will be there too, in vigorous support. Go to it, boys! You certainly have a fine organization. This column will give the date when it is definitely decided. Also any other news items.

THE other day your editor was startled to see the *Chicago Daily News* devote a full column to

Lancelot Biggs and Horsensense Hank. But here's the irony of it all. Nelson S. Bond, who created these popular characters, was not mentioned in the article! Such is fame! And your editors were quite disgruntled to think that the author we discovered, couldn't get to recognition before his character! Your editors? Why no, we weren't mentioned either!

J. ALLEN ST. JOHN, world-famous artist of the Edgar Rice Burroughs stories, recently told us that he thought ERB had never written a story as good as the coming "Captured on Venus," a Carson of

Venus story to appear in our next issue (March). And who ought to know that better than St. John who has been associated with the old master for more than twenty years!

Anyway, your editors can back that statement up to the limit. Don't miss that March issue!

EDWARD E. SMITH dropped in, on his way back from the west coast after a six-week vacation. We rather coyly admitted we'd like to see another Skylark story. So the "Doc" said he'd think about it. Hold thumbs, readers. Maybe he can do it, but, as he says, he's left the characters tightly tied up and it'll be a job to free 'em.



"Owl! Go easy, Doc. Whaddya think I'm made of?"

FANTASTIC as it may seem, there actually was a time when the stars ruled England!

King Henry II of England, who ruled during the latter part of the 12th century, would not begin his day—would not even rise from bed—until he had first had a long talk with his favorite astrologer, a Corsican named Jesus Broneti. It was the king's frequent complaint that from the instant he opened his eyes in the morning until the moment that Broneti entered his chamber, he experienced a great fear and dire foreboding.

During the day, the king often summoned his "voice of God" and in all matters of state and family, called upon Broneti to advise.

Toward the close of Henry's reign, jealous nobles, who feared also that the astrologer was in the employ of England's enemies, managed to have Broneti exiled from the court of the aged monarch despite that prince's strong protests. Many of Henry's intimates believed that the king's subsequent death was hastened by the Corsican's absence.

NO, "wahwah" isn't what the baby is saying! It's a fantastic oddity worth mentioning.

One of the Malay monkeys belonging to the gibbon family is called by the natives the "wahwah" because of the curious whooping sound it makes, especially when in flight.

The wahwah can leap fifty feet across an open space, seldom missing a branch, and will hang for long periods by one arm, gently swinging in the breeze two hundred feet above the ground in a tall jungle tree.

They even sleep in this manner! Wahwah!

SPEAKING of leaping, we can't help thinking of the kangaroo, which can cover seventy to eighty feet in a single bound. But really, the kangaroo is by no means the world's champion jumper. High honors go to the galago, an Indian monkey that can jump three hundred feet with a single effort! For shame, wahwah!

Undoubtedly, however, the best jumper of all, in proportion, is the much disliked flea. A flea can hop five hundred times its own height! Second to the flea is the grasshopper, capable of leaping two hundred times its own length.

And that's enough of jumping.

DIVERS have gone over 400 feet down. But even with all of modern science hack of him,

man is a piker when it comes to resisting pressure. The Greenland whale habitually finds it possible and desirable to survive at a depth of 4,800 feet!

Now, that's really something, when you consider that long before a depth of only a few hundred feet is reached, the pressure is measured at hundreds of thousands of pounds per square inch! Which figures out to something like *twenty-one million* pounds per square inch on that amazing whale's tough old body! We stop, aghast, when we realize how many square inches a whale has.

THE other day we ran across a fantastic story that is rather old, and rather interesting. There's no doubt about it being fantasy, so we pass it on.

It seems there is a popular Mohammedan legend often repeated in India, which is an aftermath of Adam's expulsion from the Garden for eating an apple.

Adam was taken on high by an angel and eventually arrived at Samanala, a secret mountain of Ceylon, where, before his bewildered eyes, was unrolled a panorama of the many and diverse future sufferings and sins of the race.

This must have been a lot of sour apples to him, because he was responsible for it all!

"Let the witnessing of these sufferings and sins of thy offspring be thy penalty!" said the angel sternly.

At this, Adam hurst into such a profusion of tears that he wept a lake of them. To this day pilgrims visit and drink of its waters.

Close by the lake one can easily discern a gigantic footprint about twenty-seven feet long, which Mohammedan believers say is that of the angel who carried Adam here.

ONCE again we near the end of the Notebook for this issue. As a reader says: "How do you get all those interesting hits of information?" Well, we wish it wasn't so hard. We spend more time on this department than on any other. But it really is fun, and being an editor, we like to shoot off our mouth like any other big shot. It rather inflates our ego. Anyway, we want to thank all you readers who have sent us those nice letters about our work. We'll try to keep the Notebook interesting, and for the oddities in the fantasy world, we'll keep on digging. They sometimes surprise even us.—*Rap.*



"I oughta fire you on the spot, MacIntyre. The News-Telegram has scooped us again!"

THE INSULT THAT MADE A MAN OUT OF "MAC"



HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!



LISTEN HERE, MAC. I'D SMASH YOUR FACE... ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.



THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY

OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU LITTLE BOY!



DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!



BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! LOOK AT THOSE MUSCLES BULGE OUT NOW!

LATER

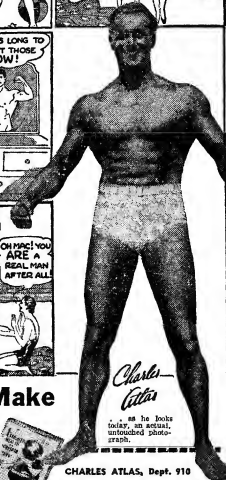


THERE'S THAT BIG STIFF AGAIN, SHOWING OFF IN FRONT OF GRACE AND THE CROWD. WELL IT'S MY TURN THIS TIME!



WHAM! -NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY!

OH MAC! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL



Charles Atlas

... as he looks today, an actual, untouched photograph.

Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a NEW MAN!

I'll show you how to get the kind of body you have ALWAYS wanted! A big-muscled, evenly-developed physique. A broad, powerful chest. Shoulders with SMASH in them. Arms and legs with energy, endurance and SPEED. A powerful back. A stomach ridged with bands of muscle. A REAL MAN'S build that stands out in a crowd!

My body-building method, "Dynamic Tension," changed me from a soft, weakling into twice-winner of the title "World's Most Perfectly-Developed Man." Let me prove it can work wonders with your body, too!

7-DAY TRIAL OFFER

TRY "Dynamic Tension" for 7 days. If, even in that short time, it doesn't begin to show you results you can see, feel, measure with a tape—you don't have to go ahead with it, and the trial won't cost you anything.

"Dynamic Tension" has done so much for me and other fellows that I simply can't say it's a waste. Make me prove it can make a new man of YOU—start now! Instead of power pushing out your chest, build up your shoulders to champion huskiness, put new, hard muscles on your biceps!

FREE 48-PAGE BOOK

Gamble a stamp, or a penny postcard. Send for my FREE BOOK today. It shows actual photos of skinny, scrawny fellows that I've helped change into husky, brawny MEN. Just put your name and address on the coupon, or on a postcard, and send it to me TODAY. Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 910, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



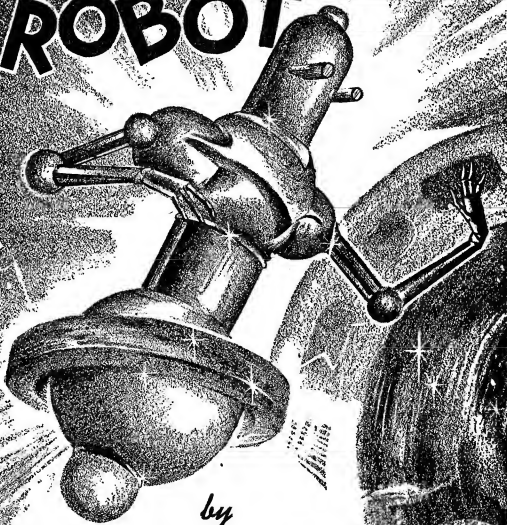
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115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-Day Trial Offer.

Name
(Please print or write plainly)
Address
City State



The FLOATING ROBOT



by

DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

Over the ether Sally O'Neill's imperious voice soared, an irresistible attraction to a weird visitor from another dimension

THE name O'Neill and red hair and temper go naturally together, and Sally had 'em all. Right now Sally O'Neill was a red-headed fury on wheels, which was something, because even when she wasn't mad, Sally was beautiful.

"Danny Marshall!" she literally flung both body and voice at the dazed young man standing before her, "how did this get out?"

"How did what get out?" asked Dan Marshall, devouring the flame of her

with his eyes.

"This!" snapped Sally, thrusting an opened magazine under his nose.

"Oh, *Radio News*, hey," he blinked and drew his eyes into focus by the simple expedient of taking a backward step. Then they widened. "Honey, you mean we got some publicity—" He snatched the magazine from her.

"Publicity!" she screamed. "Oh—Dan Marshall, I could kill you—!"

He ignored her fury for the moment.

"Small town girl blows fuse . . ." he began reading, then stopped, swallowed hard, and crimsoned to his ears.

"How'd this get out?" he bellowed.

Sally's lips tightened. "I'm asking that question, Dan Marshall, and you'd

It couldn't be—this awful crimson thing that floated over the powerhouse dynamo



better begin answering it."

Marshall's brow began to furrow in an annoyed frown and he gripped the magazine tighter as he read on. "Station KABL, Sharon Springs, Kansas, recently went off the air for over an hour on two separate occasions, when Miss Sally O'Neill, soprano, kicked the daylights out of the power tubes with (you can take it or leave it) her "high A over high C!" It seems technician Daniel Marshall didn't account for the dynamite in this lovely (we hear) little lady's voice. Might we suggest a little back-pedaling on the volume rheostat next time, Danny?"

There was a strained silence that grew more strained as his voice ceased.

"Well?" said Sally dangerously.

Marshall expelled his breath in a long whoosh, and looked at her. "I'm sorry, Sally," he said simply. "I don't know how the story got out. I didn't do it. And you know as well as I do, that our mutual contract to get you into the big-time means as much to me as it does to you. More, maybe, because after all, a guy wants the girl who's going to be his wife to get every break . . ."

"And I suppose you'll let the tubes blow out next Friday night when we go on the network," she told him. "Is that what you mean by 'breaks'?"

"Now, Sally . . ." he began pleadingly. "How about giving *me* a break? After all, has an engineer ever had to contend with the kind of a voice you've got? I tell you, when you go out over the airwaves from coast to coast Friday night on the National Talent Roundup, you're going to hit Star Lane with a bang. And how can I put you over if I don't experiment first and make sure nothing will go wrong?"

"You've tried twice now," she pointed out. "It seems to me a little thing like turning a rheostat oughtn't be so hard."

HE tossed the magazine onto the desk and taking her slim shoulders in his hands, kissed her on the lips.

"Anything's hard, when it means taking my eyes off you," he grinned. "But seriously, honey, I'm sorry this all got out, and I'll promise that in the future that pesky little rheostat behaves. In fact, I'm putting you on the dinner concert this evening with the same number you'll sing Friday night—"

"Oh!" her eyes widened. "Your—aria!"

"—yeah—and make sure we have the volume under control," he finished with a rush. "That'll give us a chance to let you hit all those high notes in my composition, and—"

"But, Danny," she protested, "you weren't going to use it until Friday. You haven't even had it copyrighted. Do you think you should?"

"Silly," he bantered. "Who's going to steal it. After all, you're the only one in the world, so far as I know, who can actually sing it, and anyway, without warning, who could get it down on paper?"

He backed away and looked her up and down critically. "Let's see—" he mumbled, "You've never seen beauty until you've seen Sally. Hair the color of all the shades of red in a tropic sunset; eyes filled with the green of calm, deep water, but eyes that sometimes flash with the angry flame of a meteor from space; an ivory-white throat with a delicious indentation where the leaping pulse of fiery youth beats visibly; high, gleaming forehead; a form so exquisite that—"

"Danny Marshall," she interrupted abruptly, "are you drunk?"

He grinned at her impudently. "No. Just going over your good points for the publicity releases I'll be giving out after Friday . . ."

He halted as she turned and tripped

lightly to a desk and a typewriter. Inserting a sheet of paper, she began typing. As she typed, she read aloud.

"Tall as a Greek god, and with wavy blond hair; eyes as blue as any sea-going Viking of old; a devil with the women; clumsy, especially with a rheostat; and oh so easy to forgive—"

The keys jammed as he leaned over the desk and kissed her again.

"Sally," he breathed, "you're a jewel!"

"WHAT a jewel!" chuckled Martin Ryker, leaning back in his leather-cushioned desk chair, and shifting his big feet to a more comfortable position on the glass-topped desk of his New York office. "Small town girl blows tubes! That's rich. This guy Kinchell is a riot. Wonder where he gets all his gags?"

Martin Ryker read on. Suddenly his feet thudded to the floor and he sat up straight, his eyes widening.

"Saaay!" he muttered, the grin wiped from his face. "It takes a pretty steady jolt of juice to blow a main power tube. And it says here she's good looking. Maybe this ain't so funny after all..."

He jabbed a fat finger down on the buzzer button on his desk. Instantly a dapper secretary, whose ferret eyes belied any look of inoffensiveness his general appearance gave, came in.

Ryker threw the magazine at him. "Page 36," he barked. "Read the gag about the girl blowing the tubes at KABL. Then get out there by plane. Get a recording of her voice, and if it's any good, in your crooked opinion, slap a contract at her. Ham, grand opera, Chesterfield cigarettes, what's the difference. She's got power. This is the age of power. I don't miss no bets. And I got lots of contract blanks. Get going!"

Martin Ryker settled back in his

seat, a thoughtful look on his face as the secretary scurried out. Then, after a moment, he grinned. "Rich!" he chortled. "That guy Kinchell knows his onions. He's got a swell grapevine. Swell!"

"SHE'S swell, boss, swell! I got some of the sweetest glitter-stuff ever put in cans. And she ain't ham, boss. She's even too good for grand opera. She's good for a coffee program any day in the week.

"Where'm I callin' from? Right here in—what's a name of this stinkin'-little burg now?—oh yeah, Sharon Springs—

"Now wait a minute, boss, and let me finish tellin' yuh. That's why I'm calling from here. I didn't get no contract—yet. Y'see, it's a funny set-up, and I gotta work it out a little devious. It seems the gal is in love with the station director, this Dan Marshall guy, and they got it all stowed away in the frigidaire. Yeah, he's gonna manage her, and get her on the top rung of the ladder of success, and then he's gonna marry her.

"Sure, boss, I talked to him. Not big money, you understand, because he's a smart boy and he has plans. I found out around town about him—plenty. The kind of a kid who has ideas of his own chain, and cleaning up on and in the big time. In fact, boss, he has been quoted as saying you are a stinking crook.

"No, boss, I didn't say that. Hold on, will you? Maybe you are, but I never say it. But he won't have nothing to do with us. And neither will she. His word is law with her, and he's the little tin god. She's plenty soft on him.

"Well, anyways, I didn't get to first base with offering her a contract. She says Danny boy is right smart, and

he'll have her up there in no time.

"Sure you got time, boss. Here's the set-up. She goes on the air Friday night over the National Talent Roundup—

"Cripes, boss, I *know* it's a rival chain. But lemme finish. She ain't gonna make no hit over the Roundup. When she gets to that first high A over high C, the volume control won't cut down for her. Blooey! Get it? She blows another tube, and the local station goes off the air for a couple hours. Sally's sore at the boy friend right now for the plug Kinchell gave her. And if Danny-boy botches it up again, making her sound like an air raid warning just before the blackout, she's going to be hopping mad, and I wouldn't be surprised if she could be easily persuaded to tear up her contract with him, if she has one.

"But that ain't all. She sang a composition of the boy friend's, written especially for that voice of hers, and it sure is a sweet one. The boy has talent. She's got the voice. Well, I found out he ain't had it copyrighted yet—in fact, it's still in the rough draft. The song, I mean. So I took the precaution to record the song as she sang it last night on the dinner concert.

"Yeah, I knew you'd know what to do in a case like this. That's why I rushed the waxy to you this ayem by airmail.

"You're coming down yourself to handle the girl? Okay with me. I'll see that the station goes off the air. That volume rheostat won't work at the proper time.

"Sure, boss, you can count on me for the dirty work . . ."

DAN MARSHALL glanced nervously at the minute hand of his watch, then fixed the control phones more firmly over his ears. It was time for

Sally to go on the National Talent Roundup.

He caught the applause for the last section of the cross country pickup, and the announcer began his smooth, dramatically uttered introduction to the next section.

". . . Miss Sally O'Neill, soprano!" he finished.

Marshall gave his meters a critical scrutiny, threw a switch that began a recording, then settled back to listen as the clear soprano voice of Sally O'Neill drifted into his ears. Her voice floated on, clear as a bell, tinkling in rising bars, ever higher.

Marshall leaned forward. "Now—" he breathed.

Sally's voice soared upward, upward, then surged out in full volume. Marshall turned the rheostat down deftly. Suddenly his earphones began to blare, rattled deafeningly, then with an abrupt finality, went dead.

Marshall tore the phones from his head, his ears ringing. Then he became conscious that the ringing wasn't all in his ears. There was a high-pitched tone that still echoed through the locked control room, almost reverberating from the walls, as though some giant clock had just tolled the hour of one.

There was a sharp crackling sound, as of an electric arc sputtering somewhere. Then abruptly the lights dimmed. As though being muffled out by an invisible blanket of darkness, they faded away, to be replaced at last by intense blackness. Marshall sat paralyzed by the phenomenon, then he blinked. There was something before him in the darkness—something hanging in mid-air in that stygian gloom!

The hair prickled erect on his scalp and his spine crawled. For there, before his aching eyes, a glow came up; a brilliant crimson glow, shot with sil-

ver flashes of incandescence. And its light revealed the most fantastic being Marshall had ever seen in any nightmare.

It was a nameless thing of gleaming red metal, perhaps five feet in height. It had a formless head, with odd projections that might have been eyes, but there were no eyes in them. It had metallic arms, terminating in almost human hands. It had no legs, but a round bottom almost ludicrously like an untipplable salt cellar, ringed by a band of what seemed to be radio-active gold.

And it floated effortlessly perhaps a foot above the floor.

Almost blinded by the angry flashings from its electrically alive body, Marshall shrank back in his chair.

"My God!" he gasped. "What is this . . . thing!"

And then, to his utter horror, he felt his whole body possessed, his brain invaded, by a nameless vibration that somehow took the form of words. He was powerless to move, and listened in growing incredulity as a voice rang out soundlessly in his mind.

"I am Yolán! Is it you who have done this to me? Twice before you invaded my world in the ether; twice before you have tried to despoil me of my freedom. Now you have succeeded. I do not like it. What is this horrible world into which you have called me? Why have you sought me out with your vibration that commands?"

Marshall was dazed, fought to regain his possession of his faculties. But he was helpless to answer. Instead, he felt his mind being probed into, the answers being dug unmercifully from him. Replies that were meaningless, because not even he knew the answers.

He felt that the incredible thing before him was sifting out the things it drew from his brain, trying to catalogue

them, understand them. And suddenly he knew that the thing was failing utterly.

"I am Yolán," repeated the monster, rather querulously. "What is this world? Why have I been trapped in this dark place? I am Yolán. I am Yolán."

Suddenly Marshall felt his brain released. He sensed in the doubting, shifting motions of the metal creature as it swayed in the air before him, that it was caught in the web of doubt, of indecision, of bewilderment perhaps even greater than his own.

Then the creature seemed to stiffen, become motionless, as though listening, or sensing something beyond Marshall's earthly perceptions.

There began a high pitched droning, a squeal that sounded oddly like the clashing heterodying of an old-fashioned receiver. Then there came brilliant flashes of light, and a roar of awful sound.

Marshall sensed rather than saw, that the creature was going to rush toward him, hurtle at him with metallic devastation.

Instinctively he threw himself prone, and for an instant, was bathed in an eerie electrical glow as the nameless bulk hurled over his prostrate form. Something struck his breast painfully. Then, with a terrific crash, a shower of plaster, wood, and bricks, it was gone. And in its place was a huge gap in the wall of the building through which a street light shone.

Down below, in the street, as Marshall picked himself dazedly up, a crowd was collecting.

"An explosion!" someone yelled. "The radio station has exploded!"

And then, inexplicably, the lights went on. Marshall stared around dazedly. They came on exactly as they had gone, as though a muffling

blanket had been lifted from them.

On the stairway the thudding of feet came. Marshall staggered to the door and unlocked it, and a blue-coated policeman burst into view.

"Begorry," he gasped. "What's goin' on in here, me lad?"

"I don't know, Flanagan!" said Marshall with tight lips. Something . . . went past me, and burst through that wall as though it wasn't there

"Something big, red, made of metal—and it floated in the air, with nothing to hold it up . . ."

Marshall stared appealingly at the frowning Flanagan.

"It was all lit up, like a weird ghost. It didn't have a face, and no legs. But it had arms, and hands, with metal fingers—" Marshall indicated his shirt, which was torn over his breast. And underneath were bloody scratches that looked like—the clawmarks of a giant cat.

Flanagan frowned. He looked at Marshall. "Have you been drinking—" he began.

Dan Marshall shook his head. "No," he said hoarsely. "I saw it, Flanagan. And I'm sure I never want to see it again. Because there just can't be anything like that!"

Marshall staggered to the door and stepped out.

And stood face to face with a blazing-eyed, tight-lipped girl.

"DAN MARSHALL," she said, voice trembling, tiny fists clenching and unclenching stiffly at her sides. "An hour ago I would have drawn and quartered the man who called you a fool. But right now, I'd shake his hand. You, utter, complete, bungler. Do you know what you've done, Dan Marshall? You've made me the laughing stock of the country. Business manager! You couldn't manage to hold your breath

long enough to embarrass the insurance company!"

Her eyes widened a moment as she saw the wreckage of the control room.

"My," she added acidly. "You've managed to blow up more than the tubes with my high notes, this time. The publicity on this will be simply wonderful! I'll be blowing up buildings and bridges next!"

"Sally," Marshall grabbed her arms. "Please! I didn't do all this. A strange metal robot did it. He came into the control room and spoke to me. He said his name was Yolán. He hypnotized me, read my mind . . ." Abruptly Marshall stopped speaking, realizing how insane his hurried words were sounding. He saw the expression of utter disbelief and disgust that was sweeping over Sally's lovely features.

"Dan Marshall!" she said in utter amazed anger. "Dan Marshall—you're drunk!"

The cold fury in her tones rose in crescendo until she almost screamed. Suddenly with a furious motion, she wrenched her ring from her finger and threw it at him. Then, sobbing, she whirled and ran from the studio into the night.

"Sally!" he called, sprinting after her, but at the door he stopped. There was no halting Sally now, he knew, and the sting where the ring had hit against his face made his heart sink to his shoes.

"Golly," he muttered. "She means that. Now I *am* in a jam."

Despondently he turned back to the studio and then halted as the dapper little man sauntered past, a slightly amazed expression apparent, even yet, on his rat-like face.

"What are you doing here," asked Marshall in sudden suspicion.

"Nothing at all. For a time I still had hopes. But now—" The little man shrugged.

"She had a nice voice," he said regretfully. "But I don't think anybody could do anything with it now. Unless you could use it for a factory whistle—"

"Why you little rat!" Marshall blazed, clenching his fist.

The dapper little man ducked hurriedly past him into the night.

CHAPTER II

The Robot Runs Amok

"THERE just can't be anything like that, Miss Latour!" the frantic, perspiring, red-faced Insurance Adjuster rasped despairingly. "We're willing to settle any reasonable claims. Especially when they involve a well-known movie actress like yourself. But when you tell us that some floating, red-metal thing-a-muh-bob comes into your, uh . . . ah . . . boudoir and shocks you into a faint—" He paused, almost hysterical, and mopped his brow. "Well, good heavens, Miss Latour, how can I tell my company that that's what they have to pay claim on?"

The raven-haired cinema star rose, pulling her dressing robe closer about her, eyes blazing.

"Do you mean to say that you think I'm lying?" she shouted.

Her agent, a fat, bald little man with a thick accent rose quickly, putting his fat hand on her arm in an effort to calm her down. "Now, now, Lettie," he said quickly, "don't get hysterical!"

She shook his hand from her arm, continuing to stare at the Insurance Adjuster. Her voice, as she spoke, was cold, low, and seething with indignation.

"For the last time," she said, "I'll tell you just what happened. And then your company better pay my claims, or I'll—"

"Please don't get hysterical, Lettie!"

her Agent implored.

"Shuddup!" the actress shouted. "This *thing* came into my room! I was telephoning long distance, New York. The operator had given us the connection, and I'd talked for almost two minutes when the hook-in seemed to grow fainter. Then there was a confusion of static. The phone began to crackle like . . . like . . . something alive. Then this horrible thing came floating into the room!"

The very recollection of the incident seemed to flood her with horror, for she pulled her dressing robe closer, shuddering, face pale.

"If you don't settle for my shock, and settle plenty—" she repeated ominously. Her voice rose shrilly. "It was terrible, I tell you, terrible!"

The Insurance Adjuster was at the door. "Okay, Miss Latour. I swear I'll do all I can. We settle! But don't let this thing get into the newspapers. If some of the other hams—uh, actresses, around Hollywood got wind that my company was paying for claims like that—" He paused to shudder. "It would break us!"

When the Adjuster was gone, the Agent turned to the actress. He rubbed his chubby paws, beaming.

"Wonderful, Lettie, colossal! What a news story! What publicity, little girl! How did you ever think of it? A metal monster visits film cutie—wow, I can see the headlines!"

The actress was gazing stonily at the little Agent, her eyes once more kindling sparks. "You imbecile!" she grated. "There *was* such a monster. I tell you I saw it!"

The Agent's face whitened. He backed toward the door. "But Lettie," he wailed. "There just *can't* be anything like that!"

He slipped out of the door just in time to avoid a flying paper weight.

IT was after midnight as the rotund, middle-aged radio "ham" closed the door behind him in his attic and, with the dazed and loving expression of an addict, walked over to his apparatus in the corner of his room. His gait was a trifle unsteady, for the party he had just returned from had been quite generously flooded with Cheering Nectar.

But a "ham" being a "ham"—drunk or sober—he was sitting at his set five minutes later, earphones on his head, intoning blearily into the small mike before him.

"C-Q, calling C-Q," the mellow and middle-aged gentleman said.

"Hello, C-Q, hello C-Q, hic," he repeated.

For a while he sat there, waiting for response. Then, slightly annoyed, he made an adjustment on the control board in front of him. Static seemed to be bad tonight, terrible.

"Hic, hello C-Q," the inebriated gentleman mumbled. "Damn, hello C-Q!"

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, an expression of extreme confusion wreathing his face. He made another adjustment, then another. In the silence of the room, the crackling response in his earphones seemed unnecessarily loud. A third adjustment, and the crackling became still louder.

The tubes on the control apparatus were glowing redly, more and more brilliantly. The "ham" tried to rise from his seat, tried to get the earphones off of his head. He failed in both attempts, and sat there, mouth agape, while the control board itself began to crackle.

There was a terrific explosion, followed by a series of wild, lightning-like flashes! The entire attic seemed bathed in a brilliant, static light. The "ham" had been thrown from his seat by the concussion, the earphones jarred from his head!

A crash of glass—and the attic window was shattered. Something red, something metal, glowing, weaving, floated into the room!

The "ham" tried to scream, tried to shout. The din and the flashing continued. Blackness closed around him.

PRECISELY TEN minutes later, his wife was helping him to his feet. She was little, gray-haired, and angry. The confusion in the room was silenced. The attic was once more peaceful. But the window was broken, and his radio apparatus was a charred, twisted thing in the corner.

"You'll have to make up your mind," his wife was saying. "Either confine yourself to radio as a hobby, or drinking. But you can't mix them both. I knew something like this would happen sooner or later!"

Sobered and shaken, the "ham" stood there, looking doubtfully around the attic. He opened his mouth, was going to tell his wife about the floating thing, the red metal thing. Then he clamped his jaws shut. Hell. It hadn't happened. There just couldn't be anything like that!

FROM THE MORNING EDITION of the *Newhaven Times*:

Last night the entire community was thrown into utter darkness when a breakdown occurred in the city power plant. For twenty hours Newhaven was without electric lights or electric power.

In a sworn statement, the night shift at the power plant declared that the breakdown was caused by forces beyond their control—that some tremendous electrical force, a *floating, inhuman thing*, invaded the plant, blowing out the turbines completely!

FROM THE EVENING EDITION
of the *Chicago Record-Herald*:
**AIRLINER CRASHES, TWELVE
DIE**

SENATOR NORDERHOFF KILLED
(USP) The mysterious crash of the gigantic, Chicago-bound Midwestern Airliner, in the Michigan Dunes early this morning has already had nationwide results in its implications. An immediate investigation by the Interstate Air Commission has been demanded by local authorities who investigated the scene of the crash.

The disaster, which resulted in the death of Senator James L. Norderhoff (Dem. Ia.), and eleven others, occurred at approximately five-thirty this morning.

Co-pilot, Jess Weems, is still lingering between life and death at the State Hospital.

The condition of the plane, which didn't burn when it crashed, leads authorities to suspect that the cause of the crash might have been something other than a mechanical one. The motor was still in almost perfect condition upon inspection. The rear of the fuselage, however, was practically completely torn away.

Co-pilot Weems, although delirious, has made several strange statements which lead authorities to believe that some human agency engineered the accident. These statements indicate that someone, perhaps one of the passengers forced a way into the pilot's compartment to deliberately wreck the ship, which was following a radio beam into Chicago.

EXCERPT FROM NEWS STORY in the *Miami Times*:

**CRUISE LINER ON REEF
RADIO BEAM BLAMED**

A strange radio static condition, which last night held the Key West

area in a state of electrical confusion, was blamed for the miscalculations made through radio beam by the officers of the cruise liner *Floridan*, and is said to have resulted in the reef shoaling of the vessel.

Passengers aboard the *Floridan* gave strangely conflicting opinions as to the cause of the grounding. Some of them swear that they could see weird lightning flashes that occasionally pierced the fog. Others, undoubtedly influenced by the well-known Loch Ness Sea Monster myth, swear to having seen an odd, red, glowing creature floating in and out between the electrical storm bursts. These statements however, have been discounted by Captain Rolf Peterson.

THE telephone lineman climbed out of the truck, pausing to strap his pole-climbing apparatus on his legs. The broad, straight stretch of Highway Eighteen was like a shimmering ribbon of mirror as the fine mist of rain sprayed relentlessly down from the darkened skies.

The lineman turned to his partner, a stocky barrel-chested little fellow wearing a black cap pulled low over his eyes. The lineman was tall, and he had to bend over to shout into the little man's ear, for it was difficult to be heard above the rumbling thunder overhead.

"This is a helluva night, Shorty," the Lineman bellowed. "I wish I was home and in bed."

Shorty grinned, and pulled his cap lower over his eyes, fishing for a crumpled pack of cigarettes in his pocket. "Don't worry me none," he shouted in response. "You gotta do the climbing!"

The Lineman grinned, then, and Shorty went to the back of the truck to get his apparatus. When he returned, the Lineman was standing beside the

tall telephone pole some four yards off the edge of the highway.

"Hurry up," the Lineman shouted. "Wanta get up and get done with it. Then we can catch some java and sinkers down the road."

Shorty nodded, handing him his equipment, then stepped back, watching as the Lineman began his ascent of the pole. The Lineman's spikes dug deep in the wood, and in a few moments he neared the top. From his perch, he could look down on the stocky, small figure of his helper. The rain was heavier, now, beating into the Lineman's face.

The thunder rolled louder, ominously, and then was followed by a smashing detonation. The pole seemed to sway. The Lineman looked down the road, along the tops of the other poles, squinting through the rain. Then his eyes widened incredulously.

Far down the line, perhaps a mile and a half away, he saw a rapidly growing orange-and-red ball of flame!

He watched, fascinated. The thing crackled along the telephone lines, flashes of electrical sparks shooting off in its wake. He opened his mouth, then snapped it shut. The pole was literally trembling from some strange vibration!

The wires next to his elbow were buzzing, and he felt the heat of them even through his thick jacket. Frantically, he moved back, his spikes digging into wood. There was one thought, now that he'd been galvanized into action—get down!

From the ground, he heard a shout, hoarse, terrified; Shorty's voice. Then, looking up again, he screamed wildly. The terrifically rushing ball of crackling sparks and orange flame was less than forty yards from him, moving with incredible speed!

But he was too late. The thing was upon him!

Blazing, crashing, numbing flashes seared his mind and stunned his body. He felt himself falling, falling—

SHORTY MET the nurse outside the door of the Lineman's hospital ward room.

"How is he?" he asked shakily.

"He'll be all right," she answered. And Shorty knew from the tone of her voice that she meant it. "You won't be able to see him until tomorrow," she concluded.

Shorty turned away. Electrical shock was what he'd told them. But God, that thing hadn't been an electrical shock! It was . . . it was . . . Shorty shuddered, seeking a word. There just couldn't be anything like it!

CHAPTER III

Key to a Monster

DAN MARSHALL snapped on the radio in his hotel room, adjusted the volume rheostat and then listened intently as the voice of the announcer suddenly swelled into being.

"Attention ladies and gentlemen! A special late bulletin from Florida. During an electrical storm in that region, witnesses reported the appearance of a strange comet-like object that appeared suddenly and flashed away out of sight before its exact nature could be ascertained. The witnesses state further that numerous bolts of lightning struck the object as if attracted to it by some strange magnetic force. The city officials are checking into the matter. Keep tuned to this—"

Dan Marshall cut off the voice with a vicious twist of his wrist and ran an impatient hand through his rumpled hair.

"That's the fourth report today," he muttered to himself, "What the hell's

back of these electrical disturbances? Power plants, radio stations, wireless units, all turned upside down. And with every one of these freakish disturbances the witnesses have mentioned a floating, flaming object, or something like that. It *can't* just be a coincidence."

He paced the floor of his room nervously. At the back of his brain an insistent fear was plucking. What was the thing that had accosted him, then blasted out of the radio station?

He frowned thoughtfully. Was the thing that had been "born," so to speak, at the radio station, the same thing that was responsible for the freakish occurrences throughout the country?

As wild as that might sound it was as logical a guess as any other until someone unearthed more definite facts about the queer creature of the ether.

What kind of a thing was it? What furnished its energy; the terrible blasting energy that could shatter without effort a wall of concrete and steel? Did it have any directional intelligence or was it just a physical projection of strange radio waves?

These questions, Marshall knew, would have to be answered before anyone could do any more than guess about the weird being.

And in the meantime he had problems of his own and his main problem concerned a green eyed bundle of feminine dynamite—Sally O'Neill!

Furious over the blow-out at the station, she was ready to sign a contract with the man, Ryker, who had flown in. She had agreed to fly to New York with him for an audition.

Marshall pounded his big fist into the palm of his hand viciously. He was convinced the grinning, smirking fellow was rotten to the core. He didn't give a hang about himself but he didn't want Sally to be taken for a ride.

He had just made up his mind to

make another attempt to change Sally's mind when there came a knock on the door. He crossed to it, opened it. Sally was standing there. Under her arm was a bundle of newspapers.

"May I come in?" she asked, in a tone of voice that would have bored through chrome steel.

MARSHALL knew the storm signals.

The flashing green eyes, the gorgeous mass of red hair tossed back that way from her proudly held head spelled trouble. He grinned and stepped aside.

"Welcome, your gracious Majesty," he bowed low as she swept past him. "This humble domain is yours forever and I am yours to command."

He forced a mask of impassive gravity over his face and took her by the arm and led her to an overstuffed chair.

"The throne is just a bit dusty but ever since we went off the Gold Standard we can't afford maid service. However," he turned her around, put both hands on her shoulders and pushed her gently into the chair, "if it were brocaded satin on solid gold it would still be unworthy—"

"Dan Marshall," she interrupted ominously, "will you stop that nonsense and listen to me?"

He looked at her closely. "You sound very grim, my dear. Outside sparrows are twittering—"

"They're not sparrows," she corrected him automatically. "They're robins."

"Robins they are, then," he agreed, "but anyway they're twittering happily, the sun is shining, God's in his heaven, everything's cheerful and bright—and look at you. You should be laughing, smiling—"

"Smiling!" she cried. "What have I got to smile about? I've got nothing to laugh at, but thanks to you, the whole country is laughing at *me*. Have

you seen the morning papers?" she demanded suddenly.

"Well, as a matter of fact," he admitted, "I haven't. But," he peered at the bundle of papers in her arm, "I have a very definite feeling that I'm going to before I'm much older."

"You're right for once," she snapped. She thrust the papers at him. "Read them. You'll get a big kick out of them. They're positively hilarious. All about the—the—vocal freak; I believe that's the expression one brilliant reporter coined."

Marshall shuffled rapidly through the papers, turning to the entertainment columns and glancing at the articles relating to the broadcast of the night before. He read a few chapters from each story and winced.

They hadn't pulled any punches. All of the papers had gone to town on the story, treating Sally as if she were some fantastic freak, who shouldn't be allowed on the air waves. But some of the stories, Marshall was forced to admit were really funny. For instance the radio critic of the *Memphis Gazette* had written:

"It is our opinion that Miss O'Neill's peculiar vocal qualities would be admirably suited to *Lights Out* program. Think of it! The announcer would introduce the program with—Light's Out! Miss O'Neill would hit her high note—and they *would* be!"

Marshall chuckled. An instant later he realized what a mistake that was.

"Oh," Sally's voice was outraged, "so you think it's funny too!" She sprang to her feet and looked eagerly about for something to throw. Fortunately for Dan Marshall there wasn't anything movable within reach. With a helpless moan she sank back into the chair.

"THAT'S the last straw," she said bitterly. "After getting me into

this trouble, making me the laughing stock of the country, ruining my chances of a radio career, you still have the nerve to think there's something funny about it."

"Now wait a minute, honey," Marshall sank to his knees beside her and tried to capture one of her hands, but she kept them firmly locked in her lap. "I didn't mean to laugh. You've gotta believe me when I tell you that I feel worse than you do about the whole thing. I feel like thirty-three varieties of rat and I'm not just being dramatic. I wanted you to go over. That's all I've been working for, dreaming of, for all these years. Together with my aria and your voice I didn't think anything could ever stop us. And nothing will. This mechanical trouble we can straighten out and then we'll be on our way up."

"All this has a familiar ring to it," Sally commented frostily.

"I know it," Marshall snapped. "I've said it over and over again because I mean it. Another thing: I don't believe your voice threw us off the air the last time. I think that rheostat was tampered with in some way."

Marshall snapped his fingers excitedly. What a stupid blundering fool he was. Why hadn't he thought of that before?

"Of course," he cried excitedly, "that's it."

He thought swiftly, the whole jumbled assortments of fact falling into a clear picture in his mind. Ryker wanted Sally's contract. What more logical than to make Sally look bad, make her look like a useless vocal freak, then make her an offer. Sure that she was a flop Sally would snap at it as a last hope. Which was just what she had done. That's what Ryker's agent had been doing near the control room. He'd tampered with the mechanism so that it

wouldn't respond to the rheostat.

"Don't you see, honey," he spoke swiftly, excitedly. "Ryker wanted you to think you were no good so he contrived to mess up the broadcast. Don't you see by signing a contract and going to New York with him you're playing right into his hands?"

"You haven't any proof of that," Sally challenged doubtfully, "and I don't think you *could* prove it. Mr. Ryker is taking me now when no one else wants me. He is willing to take a chance on my voice and give me a break. That's more than the other networks would do."

"Who said nobody wants you?" Marshall snapped belligerently. "You're going to be the hottest thing in radio and nothing's going to stop you. You've got the most glorious set of pipes that the ether has ever heard and you're feeling grateful because some two-bit chiseler like Ryker is going to audition you, because some big combine is trying to buy up talent at about one-tenth of what it's worth."

"Combine?" she snapped. "That sounds very encouraging to me. At least they'll have money. They'll be able to provide decent equipment that won't get temperamental every time someone turns on a little extra volume. It won't be a small, half-dozen watt station that spends as much time off the air as it does on. At least they'll be able to give me the opportunity of singing without fear of blowing up the control room!

"That's all I want. An opportunity to be heard. They'll give me that, and I'll be able to stand or fall on the merits of my voice alone. I'll be able to concentrate on my vocal production without worrying about inefficient engineers, cheap equipment, shortage of power—and you, Dan Marshall!"

She tossed her head defiantly.

MARSHALL put his hands on his hips and stared down at her. For a moment he said nothing, then he whistled softly.

"If I hadn't heard it," he said quietly, "I wouldn't have believed it."

Sally twisted uncomfortably under his gaze and averted her eyes.

"Well," she said, after a painful silence, "I have to think of myself don't I? I have to take advantage of an opportunity that will give me the things I want."

She looked up anxiously at his silent figure. "Well," she cried defensively, "don't I?"

Marshall's features were strained and white. "Sure," he said wearily, "you've got to look out for yourself, baby, and I don't think there's any question about your being able to do it. We're small time down here and you belong in the big time. The boys down here have helped you a bit but that's all right. Don't worry about *that!* You're going up. You've got the right technique. Don't take along any excess baggage. Use people, sure that's okay, but when they become a nuisance just dust 'em off like a fly speck."

He turned without glancing at her and crossed the room to the window. Without looking back he said, "Good luck, Sally."

Sally looked at his stiff, proud back and suddenly she was out of the chair, running to him, sobbing.

"Oh Dan, I didn't mean it," she cried, "I didn't mean it. I couldn't leave you, you know that. It was hateful of me to say the things I did."

He turned to her, his face lighting suddenly, and she buried hers against his chest. "I was angry, foolish, Dan, please forgive me," she murmured against his shoulder. "I'm not going to New York. We'll go together or not at all. I'll tell them to—to jump in the

lake. There'll be other chances and we'll take them together. I don't care about anything except being with you. Everything's all right again, isn't it, Dan? Please say everything's all right again."

DAN MARSHALL didn't answer.

Instead he did some fast thinking. He was realizing, perhaps for the first time in his life, how much Sally meant to him, and he was also realizing that he was standing in the way of her career. There was no doubt of it. What she said in the heat of anger and wounded pride had been the bitter truth. Sally needed good equipment to handle her glorious voice, expert publicity men, all the things that the others could give her and he could not. Her loyalty to him prevented her from accepting another offer, the offer that would lead her to stardom and fame. If she stuck with him she might never get there. He couldn't allow her to sacrifice herself for him. He had to make her take that offer, go to New York and there was only one way that he could do that. He hated to do it, but it was the only way he could drive her away from him.

"Stop snivelling," he snapped. "That won't make any impression on me."

She stepped back from him and dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but please don't be angry, Dan. I forgot myself for a minute because I was so disappointed and hurt that I wanted to hurt someone else. Please forgive me."

"Bravo, bravo," he jeered, "very good acting my dear. You really should be in Hollywood. Radio neglects your histrionic ability completely. But in spite of your cleverness it's no go. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not as simple as I look."

"Dan," she cried sharply, "what do you mean?"

"Aha," he smiled, "more acting. As if you didn't know. But if you really want me to draw a diagram I shall. Although I feel it's really unnecessary. In the first place you know that you're going to have a hell of a job cracking the eastern networks. Your voice isn't the greatest in the world, y'know, and on top of that you're liable to knock the station off the air before you get through. Knowing all this you realize that your chances are slim indeed unless you can get something different and sensational and inspiring to sing."

"Oh, Dan," Sally cried, "that's—"

"Let me finish," Marshall tried to keep his voice hard and brittle. "You knew this and you knew that if you could twist me around your finger I'd let you take my aria to New York with you. Well it was a good try, but it didn't work. You go to New York—without the aria. You were always just an investment to me and you turned out to be a darned poor investment. Why I even pretended to be nuts about you." He turned abruptly at the sight of her face and stared unseeingly out the window.

"Yeah, I—I even was that silly. Just to get you to put a little more oomph into your singing, but even that didn't help. Anyway you look at it, you were a complete bust to me. But I draw the line when you try to steal my aria!"

Sally backed away a step, her hand crawling to her throat. "No—no Dan," she said weakly, "you don't mean it. You're joking. Please say you're just joking."

Marshall felt something like a cold hand closing over his heart, but he forced his voice to carry a note of nonchalant derision.

"The answer is still no, baby. Get it

through that pretty head of yours that I mean it. You're a smooth article, but you're just not smooth enough. I've got work to do so I'll have to ask you to stop annoying Uncle Danny. Drop me a line when you hit the city, kid."

Marshall waited for an instant and then looked over his shoulder. The door to the corridor was open and the room was empty. Sally had gone.

MARSHALL sank into a chair and buried his head in his arms. For a long time he remained motionless and when he raised his head, his face was white and haggard with suffering.

"I did it," he muttered to himself, "I'd rather have stuck my hand into a furnace than hurt that kid, but it's for her own good. Some day she'll thank me."

So Dan Marshall sat there numbly, the anguish at what he'd been forced to do driving all other thoughts from his mind. Sally, gone this time for good. But it was better. It had to be better this way. Quick, and final.

Hours passed, while Marshall remained there in his room, quite alone with his grief. But the nostalgic recollections of Sally were becoming more than he could bear. Enough was enough. At last he rose, conscious that he must do something, anything, to drive this hellish torture from his mind.

Now he felt a sudden burst of rage, a futile, maddening sort of rage, at the thing that had been responsible for this.

Dan Marshall tightened his fists as a vivid light flashed in his brain. There was a way—

Crossing to his bureau drawer, he fished into a pile of odds and ends, bringing forth a stub nosed automatic pistol. It might be handy, for a plan that was already forming in his mind; a plan that had to do with a certain recording.

Marshall strode out of his room. Twenty minutes later, in the growing darkness, he was at the radio station.

LOCKING the doors, he went to the control room. There he secured the recording of that fatal Friday night Talent broadcast. The record that had been impressing in its waxen self the clear tones of Sally's voice, singing his aria.

Marshall had a theory concerning that record, that voice, that aria. A theory that tied in now, with growing clarity in his mind, with the weird red metal menace that had first appeared in this very same control room.

As he thought of the incident, Marshall stared at the temporarily closed wall of the room; the one that had been wrecked by the impetuous and powerful plunge of the metal horror toward some unknown destination.

It had been through that wall that the monster had gone, to create all the havoc the newspapers had been bewilderedly telling of in the past twenty-four hours. Through the radio that thing had come, and through radio and electrical waves it seemed to travel. Take, for instance, the case of the ship wrecked because its radio beam signals were awry. Or the telephone lineman who had been so weirdly jolted from his perch atop a power pole. Or the powerhouse that had gone dead in the middle of the night, completely wrecked by a weird red phantom creature that literally sucked the energy from whirling dynamos, and shorted expensive machinery. Or the crash of the air liner, causing the death of Senator Norderhoff.

Marshall thought he knew the answer now. The strange radio waves generated by Sally's unusual voice had been the real key to the red menace. Those waves had brought it blindly into being

in this very room, torn from a strange world of its own, perhaps even in another dimension. It had accused him of exactly that. But then Marshall hadn't understood.

Then, bewildered by its presence in an utterly strange place, it had sensed something, gone plunging to seek it. Had that something been the radio beam that guided the Senator's plane? Had the uncanny robot flung itself along that beam, seeking a way to return to the world it called its own, and thus crashed blindly, with the same force it had used to smash through the wall, into the plane, sending it hurtling in flames to the Michigan Sand Dunes?

The implications were stunning to Marshall, and now, with the record that he instinctively felt held the key to the floating demon in his hand, he felt his rage subside; the rage that had made him want to do something dangerous, anything, just so he could forget Sally. Did he really want to broadcast Sally's voice once again, using the record, and recall that flaming horror to this station?

Marshall grinned, suddenly, recklessly. What the hell. What did he care what happened? He'd faced the thing before—talked with it. He'd do it again, and maybe this time send it back to the place it sought; the place from which it came. He'd talk to it again. He knew it had intelligence. It would understand now, what he could tell it. He would send it back forever to its own world. He would prevent the tragedies that were taking place, perhaps more of them even now, as the robot-creature plunged madly about the country, seeking a way out of its strange dilemma.

He made his way purposefully to the broadcast room. If his hunch was right, the flaming, floating robot would be forced to return to the studio when he played those key notes that obviously

impelled the creature irresistibly to their source.

IN a matter of fifteen minutes he was ready. Then, his hand on the switch that would put Station KABL on the air, he stopped, his face a mask of chagrin. But he grinned shortly after a moment. This was going to be expensive, because when he played that record, it meant more blown-out tubes.

Abruptly he pulled the switch down, then started the recording. Hastily he barked the required announcement and call-letters into the ether, then stepped across the room, back against the wall, waiting tensely. He could hear nothing, except the faint scratching of the needle on the recording. He hadn't turned on the speaker. A moment, then suddenly the meters on the control panel leaped, flickered back and forth, then slammed back against the zero-post with finality.

"There she goes!" said Marshall grimly, aloud.

And with the words, there came the now familiar shrill heterodyning noise, the crackle of a vast kind of static, and brilliant flashes of red and white light. And abruptly, there in the deserted radio station, blackness descended, like a mantle, and the lights blanked out. For a moment Marshall stood in darkness lit by alternately flaming bursts of red and white. Then a brilliant crimson glare filled the room, making it seem like a scene out of Dante's *Inferno* and there, in the center of the room, floating motionless, except for a slight bewildered swaying was—the Radio Robot!

Marshall stood stiffly, hardly aware that in the tenseness of the moment he had drawn his automatic and held it leveled in his hand. His breath seemed frozen in his lungs, and his hair prickled on his scalp. This time, unlike the

first appearance of the terror, he could see all the details of it plainly. And an unnamed, unreasoning fear gripped him. This was nothing earthly. It was nothing remotely human. It was—alien! Utterly and impossibly alien.

The robot floated quietly a moment, seeming to regard him with its eyeless eyes. Marshall felt some queer, unhuman sense observing him, groping to understand him. And he waited.

But then, abruptly, realization of danger flooded over him. He felt invisible fingers plucking at his brain, felt his body begin to go numb under the devilish spell of the monster. Once again, as it had that first time, the creature was taking possession of his body and his will. But not completely, yet. Marshall knew that he could still command himself to a limited extent, could still force his body to obey, although sluggishly, under tremendous mental effort, the commands of his enmeshed will.

He tightened his fingers about the butt of the gun.

CHAPTER IV

Secret of the Robot

THE automatic was kicking against his rigid grip and blasting deafeningly in the silence of the room, while vivid flashes shot through the crimson darkness. But the horrible vision remained swaying there before him, even though he triggered again and again.

A last empty click told Marshall that his ammunition was exhausted. And he stood there, frozen, while the stench of gunsmoke burned his nostrils and the room rang from the shots. His useless weapon slipped from nerveless fingers, and even as it did—the *thing talked!* Calmly, coldly, as though his shots had gone unnoticed.

There were no sounds, but there was a voice. There was no language—but words stamped themselves on his mind! And dazedly, horrified, Marshall watched the creature floating redly before his eyes, while thought-communications burned into his brain.

"It is no good. You are not able to harm me. I, Yolán, am not of your world. The weapons of your world are useless against me. I seek a way back. I have been hurled into your sphere through no wishes of mine. I seek a way back. I am Yolán. I come from—"

And as the words broke off, Marshall had another form of impressions registered upon him, weird, odd, eerie mental photographic visions. Familiar vision—like newsreels of incredible number jumbled on a gigantic screen; of songs, music, speeches, dramas; of garbled commercial announcements. An utterly fantastic montage of half-human things, of unhuman things.

And somehow, too, Marshall got the impression of this world in relation to his own—another dimension was its border, another plane of existence marked the span that divided it from his own. But it had the same sun, the same moon, the same stars and stratosphere. And then the visions blurred, the montage fading out of focus until it was but a gray blot.

The words resumed, once again hammering against Marshall's consciousness. "That is my world. The world from which I was taken. The world to which I seek return. I am Yolán. It was here that I was snapped into your world through some strange gateway. It is here that the gateway must still exist. I seek that door back from your world to mine. I must return. I am Yolán."

Somehow, Marshall was speaking. He hadn't been conscious of anything

but the incredible apparition, its fantastic powers.* But now the words were tumbling from his lips and he was powerless to stop them. It was once more as though he were being drained of all his thoughts, as though the robot were forcing him, in some strange manner, to speak.

And even as he talked, Marshall was aware that the words he spoke were the results of the conscious thoughts in his mind. He heard himself, as if from a distance, narrating a wild mixture of fear, anxiety, rage and all the emotions

* Incredible as it may seem, the meaning of the uncanny things that Marshall sensed may be quite significant. The law of conservation of energy would seem to dictate that no energy is ever lost, only changed. And it can be changed to but one thing—matter! What then, happens to all the radio waves that are being broadcast in their millions every day? Are they not energy? The answer, of course, is yes. Where do they go? Do they travel ever onward into the depths of space? Here again, we must say something definite. We must say no. The Heaviseide layer does not permit radio waves to escape the earth. They have been proven to bounce back from a height of some two hundred miles. They bounce from earth to stratosphere, and back again, hopping and skipping around the earth. This accounts for the phenomenon known as the "skip-area" which has long hampered long range radio broadcasting. Short wave stations still encounter this "skip-area" and signals tend to fade altogether at certain points, these points never stationary, but moving around the earth in a definite cycle—the cycle caused by the pattern of the reflections from the Heaviseide layer.

With all these points in mind, it means that all broadcasts are retained, in some infinitesimal, and greatly scattered manner, by the earth, perhaps in a very different dimension from our own three, the three of which our senses are cognizant. Certainly radio waves are not part of our three-dimensional perception. We need artificial senses—receivers—to pick up radio waves. Then, admitting the possibility of energy becoming matter, perhaps by sheer saturation, could not Volan, the floating robot, who rides such things as radio beams, electrical flashes, telephone current, etc., be the materialization of those energies being constantly broadcast? Could he not be those energies, transformed into matter, crystallized into an intelligent being, made so by all the intelligence-patterns of those broadcasted radio waves? Science and logic lend much support to such a theory, and none against.—Ed.

he had felt upon his entrance to the studio, in addition to a recounting of the panoramic emotions that had registered upon him when the radio robot had first appeared.

The odd monstrosity seemed to be digesting all this, sorting it. But, too, Marshall realized that while this was going on he had insight into the thought processes of the creature. Evidently the radio robot was forced to leave itself vulnerable when seeking radio-mental information from others. Like an open connection on either end of an actual radio wave transmission—both able to send and receive communications.

STRANGELY, Marshall's sensations of fear had left him. His wonder and astonishment remained, but his mind had regained its ability to estimate the situation coolly. The danger, obviously, remained. But Marshall was now oblivious to it. And now his voice had ceased.

The creature still swayed before him, the heterodyning shrilling audible once more. The glow to its body was strong enough to produce illumination in the room, strong enough to bring into sharp relief the trailing arms and metallic fingered hands of it.

Slowly, Marshall could feel its mind processes digesting the information which it had sucked from his conscious thoughts. Methodically, the thing was sorting, and as it arrived at conclusions, those same conclusions were instantly apparent to Marshall.

The robot was recognizing, dimly, the reasons for Marshall's visit to the studio. Then this information was pushed aside, as the creature groped onward toward what it was seeking—information by which it could find its way out of this strange world into which it had been thrust; groping, determinedly

toward that solution. Dan Marshall could feel the robot's brain searching for that information.

It was evident that the creature had at first suspected Marshall was among those responsible for its transmigration from its own world into this. But now, as the thoughts it had sucked from Marshall's brain failed to lead it to the pattern it sought, the thing seemed to be filled with a frantic bewilderment. An instant later, and thought-words stamped themselves on Marshall's mind once more. The robot-like creature was again speaking to him.

"It was here that the door existed. You must know of the door."

And at the question, panic once more struck into Marshall's heart. Too late he realized the situation. The gateway! The robot wanted to know the gateway. And that gateway was—Sally!

Instantly Marshall knew he must keep the secret from the robot. The evil that he sensed in the creature's disregard, or was it lack of knowledge, of living things of this strange world, would be vented upon her helpless head, if the robot discovered she was his only hope of returning to his own world. And Marshall knew, too, now, that this was true. Sally O'Neill, singing his aria, with her once-in-a-thousand-years voice, was the key to the door to the other world, just as the high note was the summoning command that tore him from it. If the robot discovered what it was that had brought him, he would seek the means to reverse the action. He would seek out Sally, and try to use her to return to his own weird domain of ether waves.

He, Dan Marshall, must lie, and successfully, to a creature that could command his mind, overpower his will by sheer overbearing intelligence and mental force. As though from a distance he heard his voice saying: "I don't. I

know nothing of how you came here."

"There was a door," the creature insisted, "through which I was brought here. A door that must still be here. I, Yolán, must find that door. I must return." Suddenly he seemed to glow more redly, and jerked right and left as though blown by sharp gusts. Marshall had a sudden sensation that the creature's reactions were turning from bewilderment to frustrated rage.

And then Dan Marshall knew—realized he was being driven, against his will, to think logically toward the solution the robot sought, to seek some explanation of how this had come about, how this strange creature had been hurled from his own dimension into this! And he was unable to prevent himself from answering.

"**R**ADIO," Dan was saying unable to stop the words that tumbled from his unwilling lips. "You're from a world of another dimension, a world living side by side with ours, an other-dimensional radio world. Your entrance into our world occurred at a radio station, this station. Your entrance from the radio world must have come through radio." As Marshall spoke these halting, elementary sentences, he realized that the radio robot was using his mind, blindly probing his knowledge of the natural world, to gain information which the robot itself was unable to comprehend!

"You entered our world through this station," Marshall continued, "at a time when—" and then Marshall tried to halt the words he knew were coming.

But his struggle was short-lived. His mind, battling desperately against the will forces of the robot, seemed to bend back in against itself until he could stand it no longer. Marshall gave in—and the words tumbled from his lips.

"At a time when," Marshall continued, "Sally had just blown the station hook-up with the high note she took. The high note that wasn't controlled by the engineer." And suddenly Marshall's voice stopped. It was as though the force which had been impelling him had unexpectedly ceased—because the robot had gotten its desired information.

There was an ominous silence in the darkness of the room. A silence in which the weird, suspended monstrosity glowed strangely, while Marshall felt the creature digesting the information.

"I understand. It is clear to Yolana now," the robot's words again burned into Marshall's brain. "It is this Sally creature. She holds the key to the door. The power by which I was torn from my world."

Marshall felt his scalp tingling at the menace of the words, cursing himself wildly for not having had the strength to resist the will of the radio robot. Sally—he'd betrayed her. This monstrosity would— Marshall choked off the thought. He had to get away, quickly, before he was again drained of more information by the monstrous floating thing!

He tried to turn, but he seemed to be literally frozen, unable to move his legs or twist his body. Then the voice of the radio creature was sending words to his brain once more.

"This Sally creature. I must find her. I know now, given time, how to open the door and return to my own world. But it will do me no good to return, if she lives. For she has the key—the power, to call me, against my will, back here. That must not happen again, after I return. So I must kill her. You shall tell me where to find her. You must! You will!"

The words burned with a command that defied all resistance, and again

Marshall found himself speaking.

"A plane," he said, "such as you smashed down when you rode the radio beam. It will carry her to New York. She will be on that plane. You will find her on that plane. Even now she should be on her way."

Again the pressure seemed to be released. Again he was free of the monster's will. But it was too late. The radio robot now knew all he needed to know!

And suddenly, too, Marshall found he was once again able to move, once again able to breathe free of the strange radio-active shackles this creature had forged about his being. The heterodyning shrill rose in tempo, and the red metal body of the floating thing seemed to crackle with electrical vibrations—just as though gathering together power for momentum.

Marshall stood, frozen, then gasped as the robot reached out, took the record that was the key to his existence, the force that could call him from where he roved the ether, and smashed it, *deliberately*. It was as if the thing had said: "Now try to call me back!"

A sudden, blasting, raw-edged whine—and the thing was gone, with incredible speed! And once again the monster had moved in the line of quickest direction—straight through the concrete and steel of the station walls!

And again, the blanket of darkness that had enveloped the station was lifted. It was as if a fuse had been blown somewhere, and was now repaired. Lights flooded the room again!

MARSHALL paid scant attention to the ragged gap in the side of the wall, the gap through which the radio robot had hurtled, for the one thought in his mind was that of Sally. The robot was headed for Sally, seeking her, and knowing that she was on a plane

bound for New York!

In three swift strides he was across the room and out into the hallway. Deserted, but an office door was ajar at the end of the hall. Marshall had some wild idea of calling the airport, chartering a plane immediately to overtake Sally's, as he headed for the open office door. And then, the sight of an electric clock above the door stopped him dead in his tracks.

The thing had been stopped, of course, during the time that the radio robot had been in the building. But the time to which the hands pointed gave Marshall a start. When he'd entered the building, there had been still an hour and a half before Sally's plane was to leave. An hour and a half.

Instantly, Marshall realized this, and realized, too that he had lost all track or sense of time during his encounter with the metal monster. But it couldn't have been an hour and a half. It couldn't have been that long.

Marshall cursed himself and looked at his wrist watch. In his haste and fear he had forgotten it completely. It wouldn't have been affected by the robot's presence—even though the electric clocks in the building had. By comparing the time of the stopped clock on the wall to his own watch, Marshall was able to approximate the length of his stay in the building. It had only been an hour. There was still half an hour left, a half an hour in which he might be able to stop Sally from boarding the plane. The plane which, somehow in his confusion, he had figured Sally already aboard.

There was a chance, although a scant one, that he might be able to reach Sally at the hotel. Marshall had moved into the office with the open door, even as he mentally considered this. An instant later and he was at the phone.

The desk clerk hesitated, while Mar-

shall's heart hammered wildly in his chest, asking someone if Miss O'Neill had checked out yet. Then he came back on the wire.

"Think she's still in her room. I'll connect you," the clerk said over the phone. Marshall closed his eyes, praying silently that Sally was still there, while the receiver in his ear buzzed softly as the desk clerk tried to get her room on the switchboard.

SWEAT stood out in little beads on Marshall's forehead, and he ran a trembling hand nervously through his blonde hair as he waited. The very seconds seemed like separate eternities. Then—at last—he heard the click of the receiver in Sally's room being lifted.

"Sally!" Marshall was unable to keep the relief and overjoyed emotion from his voice.

The girl had instantly recognized Marshall's voice. For immediately she murmured something glacierally, and her voice was fading away as though she intended to hang up.

"Sally!" Marshall's tones were those of desperate urgency, and they must have communicated themselves to the girl, for she said stonily:

"Yes, what do you want? Please make it brief. I'm in a rush."

"Just that!" Marshall blurted, realizing that his haste would give him scant chance to put across what he had to say. "It's about your leaving, Sally. You can't do it. You mustn't. Please, I beg you!"

"Is that all you called for—a dramatic, amateurish, last-minute sob act?" Sally's voice was frigidly itself.

"But listen, Sally," Marshall was cursing himself desperately for the botch he was making of this. How could he tell her that some damned, grotesque monster was threatening her life—and make her believe it? The only thing

he'd be able to do would be to stall her off. Try to make her stay in the hotel until he got there. Then it would be too late to take the plane. The plane for which the radio-robot was now more than likely searching the radio beams!

"Sally," he continued desperately. "Your life is in danger if you take that plane. I haven't time to tell you now. You *must* wait at the hotel until I get there! For the love of heaven, Sally, please listen to me!"

"As cheap gags go," he heard Sally's voice replying acidly, "that was rather good. Considering it came from someone so cheap himself!"

"Sally," Marshall was straining every effort of will to get his message to her, to make her believe him. But even as he spoke he knew it was useless to try to crack the shell she'd built to cover the hurt he'd inflicted on her. "Sally," he pleaded. "Listen to me, for the sake of what we used to feel, for the sake of what we once meant to one another—listen to me!"

"How touching. Really, you should try radio theatricals sometime," Sally's voice replied. "There's a lot of money in it for anyone who can make animal sounds—of the snake variety!"

"Sally," Marshall's voice was one last pleading effort. "You have to wait. Please! I can explain!"

"Sorry," Sally answered, and it seemed that the coating of ice to her tones had thickened with each reply. "Sorry. I'm in a hurry. I have a plane to catch. To New York. If what you have to say is really important, you might send it air mail—to your congressman!" The click of the receiver was quite final in its sound.

Marshall slammed the telephone down, gritting his teeth. She was starting for the airport. It was almost half an hour from the radio station to the airport, and less than that from the ho-

tel to there.

There was one last chance—try to get to the airport before the plane left. He knew, as he rushed from the office, that Sally would arrive at the airport before him. He hoped that she wouldn't be gone—also—before him!

Dashing out of the station building, Marshall found a taxicab waiting on the corner. He clambered inside, stuffing a ten dollar bill into the startled driver's paw.

"The airport," he gasped, still breathing hard, "as fast as you can make it!"

The cabbie did his best—within the law. But there were stoplights, and no amount of persuasion on the part of Dan Marshall could induce him to break the law. They pulled into the airport just as a huge, tri-motored transport plane took off, rising eastward. Marshall was out of the cab, looking after the rising ship until it was lost in the darkness of the sky. Lost in the sky in which the robot waited for Sally!

CHAPTER V

Killer in the Sky

FOR several stunned minutes, Dan Marshall stood there, gazing up at the vast black sky—fighting off the horrible realization that his chance of saving Sally had disappeared even as the tiny gray silhouette of the huge airliner had vanished in the gloom.

Gone—and there was no way to stop her. Even now the robot might—Marshall couldn't finish the thought. It was too ghastly. Not Sally. Sally couldn't die. He had to stop that plane—somehow!

And then Marshall wheeled, seized by a sudden daring idea—inspiration born of his frantic urgency. There was a way, a possibility, and anything was worth a gamble!

A message. A message along the radio beam would do it, might reach the plane in time to avert the certain disaster that lay ahead.

Marshall's long legs carried him swiftly across the landing field, past the depot waiting rooms, and up to the Airport Radio Room. Through the lighted window, Marshall could see two operators sitting over wireless keys inside the place. There was also a man in the uniform of an Army Lieutenant standing before a desk. Marshall barged through the door.

The Lieutenant, a tall, dark young fellow, turned quizzically at his hasty entrance. One of the operators looked up from the wireless key before him.

"I must get in touch with the airliner that just left for New York!" Dan said swiftly, loudly. "It's extremely urgent!"

The Lieutenant smiled curiously. "What's the trouble?"

Marshall started to speak, then cut off the words he had almost uttered. It would do no good to tell them the truth. They'd send no messages for madmen. And they would certainly think him mad if he babbled about robots and plane crashes. Desperately, he searched his brain for a logical excuse, something that would enable him to talk them into putting the message through.

"There's a girl aboard," Dan said, forming his idea as he spoke, "whose mother has taken ill, seriously! I must get in touch with her. I tell you, it's urgent. I must get a message to the ship." As he finished, Marshall was thinking swiftly. A message to the airliner might result in an emergency landing—he hoped. If he could get them to make such a landing, could put across his message, he might avert the robot's head-on crash with the airliner.

The Lieutenant nodded sympathetically. "We can send a message to the next airport—but that's all. As soon as

she arrives there she'll receive it."

"But I've got to reach her in the plane, immediately!" Marshall's voice was frantic.

The Lieutenant shook his head. "Sorry. Against communication orders. Airship wave lengths are to be used strictly for navigation communications between the ships and the ground stations. Besides, it wouldn't hasten matters any if the girl were to get the message in the plane. She'd have to wait until it landed at the next stop, anyway."

Marshall was already cursing himself inwardly for a blundering fool. His hastily constructed lie had been much too hasty, much too stupid, to aid his plans. He stood there, hesitating for an instant, then his hand, which had been groping about in his pocket, touched his automatic. The weapon was empty, and quite useless. But it might serve. In a swift motion, he drew, leveling the gun on the three startled occupants of the wireless room.

HE tried to keep both hand and voice steady as he held the gun on the three. "You'll send the message I tell you," Marshall snapped. He lifted the gun slightly, ominously.

The Lieutenant's tone was suddenly soft, deadly, as he said:

"Listen, fellow, I don't know what in hell this is all about, but you'd better put that thing down before it goes off. There'll be no messages sent from here. Don't be a fool!"

The wireless operators sat at their keys, faces turned in astonishment toward Dan, but there was no fear in their expressions. Marshall groaned inwardly. His threat was—like his gun—quite empty. His bluff had been called. These men, even though they must think him mad, were displaying cool courage.

And at that instant, even while he hesitated, the door behind Marshall was opened. Quickly, Marshall stepped to the side, gun still leveled on the three in the room, eyes flicking to the person who had just entered. The intruder was a man in greasy overalls, obviously an aviation mechanic. He didn't see Marshall, and spoke directly to the Lieutenant.

"Your ship is ready, Lieutenant," the mechanic said. "We've rolled her up on the ramp, and she's all set to go."

And then, noticing the fixed expression on the Lieutenant's face, the mechanic wheeled, saw Dan Marshall and the gun he held in his hand.

"Okay," Marshall snapped, waving the gun to include the mechanic, "step over beside the Lieutenant, and no tricks!"

A new idea—a daring scheme—had suddenly come to Marshall. It was born with the entering speech of the mechanic, and by the sight of the Lieutenant's overcoat and visored cap lying on a table less than five feet from where Dan stood. A ship, evidently an army plane, Dan was thinking. It would have a radio. It would—

He didn't need to reason any further. His own past in the air-mail service would come in handy now. He stepped to the table, still holding the gun on the others, and picked up the overcoat and visored cap. Clumsily, he kept the gun steady, and somehow managed to don the coat and cap.

This had consumed less than sixty seconds—one breathless minute while the four watched him in silent amazement. Now Marshall was at the door, still keeping them covered with the automatic.

"Okay, gentlemen," Marshall snapped. "I'm leaving, but I'll be looking over my shoulder for three or four minutes as I go. It won't be smart for

any one of you to stick your nose out the door of this shack until after that time!" Marshall had backed to the door, still open as the mechanic had left it. Now he stepped out onto the stoop. Then, quickly, he slammed the door shut on the men inside, wheeled, and dashed down the steps.

There was only one plane on the take-off ramp, and the ramp was less than a hundred yards from the shack. Marshall, burdened by the heavy army overcoat, made the ramp in a little over ten seconds. The mechanics who were around the U. S. Army fighting plane, were startled as Marshall drew up beside it.

"Okay," Dan snapped. "In a hurry. Let's get under way!"

To all appearances, Dan was an Army Officer, and the grease monkeys, though startled, helped him willingly into the cockpit. Then, as Marshall throttled the ship to greater life, he saw the blocks snapped away, and he gunned the plane down the runway.

Marshall took one quick look over his shoulder, before the tail lifted. One quick look that showed him four angry men dashing from the Airport Radio Room toward the now deserted take-off ramp!

And then Marshall was easing back on the stick, and the swift little combat ship climbed skyward as the black ground blotted off in darkness beneath him. Above, the starless sky waited tauntingly—as though challenging him to overtake the airliner, to get his message to the great ship before tragedy, stark calamity, struck at Sally O'Neill.

IN the pilot's compartment of the Transcontinental Airliner *Hawk*, the co-pilot at the radio board looked quizzically at his partner.

"I can't understand it, Clem," he said. "This damned static is increasing with-

every mile we make. "I'm having a helluva time trying to get the ground stations ahead. They just don't seem to come through, even though we're on the beam."

The pilot, a wide-shouldered, freckled, young blond, shook his head worriedly. "Try again," was all he said.

THE ATTRACTIVE young stewardess moved down the aisle of the Hawk's cabin smiling at the passengers, arranging pillows and pausing occasionally to answer questions.

She was passing along the aisle when a short, fat man caught her by the arm. The passenger list gave his name as "Ryker." He sat on the outside of the aisle, next to a lovely red-headed girl whom the list identified as "Miss Sally O'Neill."

"Listen, Stewardess," Ryker said, "aren't we traveling rather rough on this hop? Seems as if something might be haywire with our course."

The stewardess smiled reassuringly. "Not at all," she answered. "The weather's rough tonight, yes. But there isn't anything to worry about. We'll be into better conditions shortly."

Ryker nodded doubtfully. "I see," he said. "I guess so. I was just curious. Don't want anything to happen. This little lady here," he pointed to the red-headed girl beside him, "has to get to New York without delay. Got an important broadcast to make, and she can't afford to miss the only rehearsal she'll have."

The stewardess smiled again. "Miss O'Neill will arrive on schedule, never fear." Then she moved down the aisle as Ryker turned and began to speak to the girl.

THE FRECKLE-FACED pilot of the Hawk moved his wide shoulders restlessly and turned to the co-pilot. His

voice was slightly uneasy as he spoke.

"Try to get that beam-call in a little clearer," he said. "It seems to me that we're not riding smoothly. There's no reason for static, unless there's an electrical storm ahead of us. Get in touch with the ground shack a hundred miles ahead. See if they've noticed anything."

The co-pilot moved his hands expressively. "Hell, Clem, I'm trying to do that. I've been trying for almost fifteen minutes. But this static condition is getting worse and worse."

The pilot shook his head bewilderedly. "For a radio beam, the points we're riding are about as smooth as a roller coaster. Keep trying."

Muttering inaudibly, the co-pilot went back to his radio.

DAN MARSHALL was giving the little combat ship a dose of hell. For fifteen minutes now, he'd torn the guts out of the motor in an effort to narrow down the distance between himself and the Hawk.

His mind was torn in an agony of anxiety and terrifying apprehension. Every single mile he'd put behind him had been this way. And he still had no sight of the Hawk ahead. Marshall had used the radio again and again, sending our frantic messages in the hope that the pilots of the huge transport plane might somehow receive them.

But there were indications which might mean a foreboding of disaster. For, from his radio, Dan Marshall was able to realize that the static conditions in the sky around him were growing steadily worse and worse. This meant but one thing—that he was getting closer and closer to Yolán. Obviously, the radio robot's prowling of the beam was responsible for these static conditions. Soon, perhaps, he might be close enough to get a message to the airliner.

He'd *need* to be close to pierce the static!

But sooner than that, perhaps, the monster might find the *Hawk*—and Marshall dreaded to think of the results that would follow. He knew, now, that the situation had narrowed down to one premise. He would get to the transport ship before the robot did—or Yolán would find the plane before Marshall's message could reach it.

So there in the blackness of the night, two thousand feet above a mountain range, Marshall throttled his ship ahead, hoping, ever hoping, peering ahead in the darkness, until suddenly his eyes narrowed and his hope crystallized to an emotion approaching almost hysterical relief. Ahead of him, perhaps a mile and a half in the gray-black night, he saw the flickering sheen of silvered wings!

Frantically, almost sobbing, Marshall reached for his radio hook-up on the control board. Reached for it, then stopped midway, his hand clenching in sudden, awful horror. For far off in the distance, so far as to be but a tiny dancing spark, something was moving to meet the *Hawk*. And that something, beyond all shadow of doubt, was the Floating Robot!

It was growing—that dancing, meteor-like spark. Growing as Marshall watched in frozen terror. Growing as it hurtled at incredible speed along the beam; hurtled toward the big plane!

SOMEHOW, Marshall had the radio apparatus in his hand, was shouting into the ship's transmitter mike.

"Calling Airliner *Hawk* . . . Calling pilot on *Hawk* . . . Veer Off! . . . Veer, for God's sake!"

But the spark was growing until it was a monstrous ball of crackling electrical flame, hurtling blindly toward the airliner. Marshall was shouting into

the transmitter mike, again and again, almost insanely. The silver winged transport ship suddenly was bobbing cork-like, this way and that, as the pilot apparently saw the swift menace approaching. He was descending now, trying to land.

Marshall's lungs were torn and hoarse, but he shouted again and again, as though he could, by the very volume of his voice, avert the terror of the impending catastrophe.

And then the hurtling ball of electrical hell was upon the great airliner—and suddenly, at the last instant, the *Hawk* was veering!

But it veered too late, for Marshall, even as his breath tore in his lungs, saw both ship and robot bob in the same direction! Even as the air became thick with crackling static, above it came the sickening sound of the great metal wing of the transport plane shearing!

Yolán had hit the wing—and the great ship was twisting earthward, swiftly falling, falling. Marshall groaned with the torment of a man in hell, and threw his hand across his face. He couldn't bear to watch it, couldn't, couldn't. His mind was lanced with agony—Sally . . . Sally! . . . going down to her death!

Beneath, the cruel peaks of the mountain ranges waited, ready to embrace the falling plane, ready to gnash their fanged teeth into the twisted wreckage that would crumple there.

Marshall kicked his plane into a steep, twisting climb, blotting out the horror of the sight for a merciful instant. Numbing the agony that gripped his brain for an instant at least. And finally, levelling the ship out, Marshall forced himself to look over the side.

The wreck was down there on the snow-peaked crags—but incredibly, was not burning, was not torn asunder

by the rock ridges! The wing was gone, but that had happened in midair, and now the ship lay on its belly, otherwise intact. By a miracle of skill the pilot had landed the ship! Dancing around it, though, was the crackling flaming ball that meant Yolán! And then Yolán shot away, into the forest!

And in that startled instant, Marshall dared to believe that the astonishing miracle had really happened—that Sally, pray God, was still alive. For from the position of the ship, from the very appearance of it—there was a good chance that she was—A chance!

One glance was enough to show Marshall that there wasn't the slightest chance of his being able to land his ship on those mountain ridges. The attempt would mean instant death. The transport plane had settled there through miracle, but miracles didn't happen twice. There was, therefore, but one thing for Marshall to do. Get back to the airport. Get back as swiftly as wings could carry him, and report the crash, rescue the survivors from the crags, if they—*she* still lived.

But suddenly Marshall realized that he couldn't return to the airport. He couldn't risk it—for at this very moment the hue and cry over his theft of the Army plane was probably under way. By now every field within flying range of the place was probably on the lookout for him. And soon—if it were not already a fact—there would be other ships searching the skyways for his pirated plane.

But he had to get back to the *Hawk*, had to get there before Sally—if she were still alive—fell victim to the floating robot! With every thought, Marshall tried desperately to make himself believe Sally still lived.

Marshall ruddered the fighting ship hard, pointed the nose back in the direction from which he'd come. Two

things were now clear to him. He couldn't return to any legitimate landing field, and, should he manage to get to the *Hawk*, there would be only one way to defeat the robot. One way born around an inspiration that had occurred subconsciously to him less than a minute ago.

It was a wild scheme, perhaps an impossible one, but there was a chance of its working. And too, it would fit in perfectly with the fact that there was no legitimate field where he could land. For Marshall had remembered a field, a deserted, barren, bumpy long-undeveloped realty tract near the radio station. He would be able to land there—maybe. And from there it was less than ten minutes to the studios, where, he could organize the rest of his plan before he set out for the *Hawk*.

Less than a quarter of an hour later, Marshall—with the aid of God and good air sense—set the ship down on the deserted realty stretch. And in less than half that time, he was racing up the steps and into the radio station.

CHAPTER VI

Death in the Mountains

THE ground was rushing at her. Saber-sharp crags reached up at her like the open jaws of some hungry beast.

Sally O'Neill jerked the crash belt tighter about her slim waist and breathed a silent prayer. It was only a matter of seconds before the *Hawk* would dash itself into splintered wreckage on those razor keen rocks.

"Ready." It was the Stewardess moving down the aisle. "Two hundred feet. Prepare for crash!"

"Damn it," Ryker screamed, "do something, do y'hear, do something! I don't want to die."

There was no answer from her but Sally looked scornfully at the small, trembling figure of the radio executive.

"Why don't you jump?" she snapped.

The next instant the plane brushed a high rock and a rending, splintering noise crashed into her eardrums.

"This is it!" someone shouted.

The ship nosed over sharply and then with sickening abruptness, its forward motion was checked. It was as if a giant hand had stretched out to catch the crashing ship.

Sally cried out as her entire weight strained against the narrow strap that circled her waist—then a mantle of blackness settled over her.

When she opened her eyes the plane was still, evidently resting in the ravine. Sally crawled to her feet, trying to pull her confused, bewildered wits together.

Her eardrums rang with shock and dizziness and she moved awkwardly to the door. One of the pilots was climbing from his seat shaking his head.

"It's crazy, impossible," he muttered.

Sally's hand was on the knob of the door when a heavy hand fell on her shoulder, spun her around and away from the door.

It was Ryker, his face twisted with hysterical fear.

"Out of my way," he screamed, "Let me out of here!"

HE jerked open the door and sprang to the ground, sobbing wildly. Sally started to follow him and then she stopped—her mouth opening in horror.

Something was floating toward the ship! A red and gold ball of metal, surrounded by white, crackling sparks and flame. Ominously, silently, it floated toward the ship as if directed by some evil, malignant intelligence.

Sally heard her own terror stricken scream ringing in her ears before she was aware that she had opened her

mouth.

Ryker heard her and wheeled, his face going a pasty white as his eyes focused on the horrible apparition floating toward him.

"Keep away," he screamed. "For God's sake keep away." His voice broke into an hysterical, mouthing babble as he backed away from the silently advancing creature. Then he turned and fled, his hoarse bleating screams trailing over his shoulder.

For an instant the fiery monster seemed to hesitate, then it flashed after him, the huge metallic ball of energy whistling through the air like a meteor.

Sally screamed again. And then the creature of flame was on top of Ryker. A terrible bleating scream ripped through the air and Ryker was on the ground threshing horribly under the attack of the weird monster.

Sally covered her face with her hands. It was too awful! Her thoughts broke off suddenly and her heart seemed to swell in her chest until it would choke her. And even at that instant—she knew!

This creature, this weird, incredible apparition must be the thing that Dan had tried to warn her about. And it was looking for her! She stifled the scream of panic that welled in her throat and looked desperately about for some place to hide.

About a hundred yards from the plane a slope led to a ridge and beyond that the dark opening of a mining shaft was visible.

In an instant she was on the rough uneven ground, running, stumbling toward the shaft, toward safety. A frantic glance over her shoulder showed her the incredible figure of the radio robot still hovering over the now still body of Ryker.

Within fifty yards her breath was searing her lungs and throat like a hot

blast from a furnace. Her heart hammered painfully against her ribs, but she couldn't stop. If she did— A sob wrenched itself from her throat as she pictured her fate at the mercies of the hideous fury of the radio robot!

HER high heels twisted and turned on the rocky, treacherous ground but somehow she managed to keep her feet, and stumble onward. The wind whipped her auburn-red hair over her face, blinding her but she struggled on, desperately, frantically, knowing that her only slim chance was to keep running, to reach the comparative security of the mining shaft before the robot caught her.

Twenty feet from the entrance of the shaft she heard a hissing, roaring noise behind her. Twisting, she saw over her shoulder a huge, flaming ball of red and black fire, flashing about the ship, seemingly confused and baffled.

Sally sobbed a prayer of thankfulness and hurried up the few remaining feet that led to the sanctuary of the shaft. At the dark entrance she paused and looked back at the plane. The flaming robot was still circling the plane but suddenly his course veered. He was flashing away from the plane, hurtling over the ground toward the entrance of the shaft!

Sally fought back a scream. Somehow the creature had discovered her trail, and was flashing with incredible speed toward her. For the briefest flicker of a second, she remained paralyzed with fright, then she wheeled and ran into the shaft.

Stygian blackness enveloped her immediately. She fled through the shaft, her feet finding footing by a miracle. She knew she was running downhill, toward the center of the mountain; and she was also aware that she was running on rail tracks, for her heels caught

and twisted on the ties. And suddenly her heel caught and held, her ankle twisted sharply, throwing her to the ground. For a second she couldn't move, and then she crawled to her feet, looked fearfully back up the shaft. There was a queer flickering illumination at the mouth of the tunnel and then the radio robot was in sight, its hissing, crackling, red and gold body silhouetted in terrible clarity against the blackness of the night.

Sally whimpered in terror, but she did not quit. Wheeling, she ran again, her breath escaping her throat in great sobs. Behind her she could hear a terrible noise that sounded like the crackling of a mighty blaze. Then by the flickering eerie light that was illuminating the tunnel she saw a tunnel siding branching off to her left. Without thinking, she hurled herself to the ground, crawled into the siding. Quivering with terror she crouched helplessly against the rough wall of rock and waited!

THE noise at the mouth of the shaft was growing in volume and then the tunnel itself was filled with the roaring ominous noise. The entire shaft trembled slightly and then with the speed of a meteor and the noise of an express train, the floating robot flashed past her, and disappeared into the bowels of the earth.

It was hunting, Sally knew, for her!

Trembling, she crawled to her feet and bumped into a hard, heavy object. She saw that it was a small car loaded with ore, set on the siding track. Moving around it, the idea came to her. It was wild but—

She ran to the front of the ore car and jerked out the wooden blocks from under the wheels. Then she hurried to the rear of the car, her pulses throbbing madly. Bending low she braced her

shoulder against the grab-iron of the car and shoved with all of her weight and strength. For a terrible second the car remained motionless, then it was rolling slowly, the rails creaking protestingly under its weight.

Sally panted exultantly as the car gathered momentum and speed. With a final shove she sent it rolling onto the tracks of the main shaft. It gathered speed swiftly and with a rattling, metallic roar, sped down the rails—after the floating robot.

Sally watched as it rocked and rattled down the rails. And then it happened.

The car was off the trail, plowing along the track and ripping into the soft shale shoulder that flanked the tunnel. Sparks flew, a steady roar filled the tunnel, then tons of dirt and ore were collapsing from the walls and ceilings, burying the car under their weight.

Sally watched, held in horrified fascination as boulders and rocks piled together in a jarring, shattering tangle, completely sealing the tunnel. Sally sobbed in relief. The thing, the weird apparition that had menaced her, was down there buried under tons of rock and dirt. Blocked off!

The noise of the crash slowly trembled away into silence, but she was aware then of another noise. A steady, burring noise that filled the darkness with an angry crackling sound. It seemed to come from deep under the debris and to be heading with irresistible power toward her.

Sally trembled. It was the creature, she knew, burrowing relentlessly forward. He hadn't been destroyed by the cave-in, merely enraged, momentarily blocked off.

She wheeled then and ran for the mouth of the shaft. In the darkness she didn't see the beam. It was slipping from its place and she darted under it.

A hard, unyielding weight crashed

into her shoulder, and Sally O'Neill felt nothing more but blackness.

THE tiny truck thundered around a sharp, banked turn on the white ribbon of highway, but Dan Marshall, at the wheel, didn't lessen his pressure on the accelerator the slightest. From the instant he'd entered the station, he had worked swiftly, desperately. And now he was driving wildly, torn by an anxiety of impatience, as the burning tires of the truck ate up mile after mile, racing against time.

The speedometer needle wavered at eighty, while the tiny truck two-wheeled, then righted itself. Now Dan straightened out around the turn, and the speedometer needle crawled slowly, surely, to ninety-five—the maximum speed which the little vehicle could reach.

Hearing the equipment in the back of the truck slide perilously to one side, Marshall breathed a swift prayer that none of it should be damaged. And then he cursed inwardly, for he still was uncertain that he'd ever have the opportunity to use it. If Sally had been harmed, if Sally weren't alive when he reached the wreck: Marshall shuddered at the thought, his foot mashing the accelerator until it seemed as though he were pushing it through the floorboards.

The roads were growing steeper and with every twisting turn the tiny truck creaked protestingly against the ruthless treatment it was receiving. Marshall, if he noticed this, was not concerned. His face, twisted in anxiety, was fixed rigidly on the road ahead of him. Somewhere along here there should be a highway siding—a siding leading to a bumpy gravel off-road. That gravel route would take him to the scene of the airliner's crash.

And then, rushing up at him, and caught for an instant in the white glare

of his headlights, Marshall saw the sign-board that told him the gravel road was less than a quarter of a mile away. Ten seconds later, Marshall had slowed the truck enough to throw it into a sliding, crunching, sickening turn that brought him around facing the road siding. Then, throwing the truck into second, he was thundering ahead toward the gravel off-road.

Minutes later, Marshall's truck was bumping perilously, recklessly, along the gravel road. It was as steep and winding as it was bumpy, bleak trees hemming it in along the sides. Marshall knew, now, that he had to run the risk of damaging the equipment, had to sacrifice everything, risk all, in his efforts to beat Time.

Four miles ahead, four miles in which the truck had climbed better than a thousand feet, Marshall heard a sound which made him instantly kill the motor and leap from the truck—a hoarse shout, coming from deep back in the roadside, behind the thick maze of forest!

And as he stood there, beside the truck, looking uncertainly right and left through the darkness, the shout was repeated.

"Hallllooooo, t h e r e ! Hellllllllp, halllooooo!"

Marshall had placed the sound, and was barging off the road and into the underbrush of forest, heading for the voice, shouting himself, "Coming! Coming!"

Three hundred feet later, Marshall emerged from the forest underbrush and stood at the edge of a clearing that marked a narrow mountain ravine. He gasped a sobbing cry of relief—for there in the clearing was the wreck of the *Hawk*, and surrounding it were the survivors of the disaster!

MARSHALL was running across the clearing, and one of the group

huddled beside the plane was coming to meet him. From the fellow's dress, Marshall knew him for one of the pilots.

And then, while Marshall stood beside him, the fellow was babbling incoherently, clutching frantically to his arm, his face white and torn with strain.

"Thank God, you've come! Where are the rest? We're going crazy . . . all of us. Terrible! One of the passengers, a man, gruesomely torn apart by some hideous thing . . . Girl . . . ran like hell toward the forest edge, up a grade leading to that old mine there," the pilot pointed. "Don't know how we were cushioned into our landing . . . shouldda been killed . . . all of us . . . a monster . . . a crackling thing from hell I tell you . . . followed the girl after killing that guy . . . we all saw it . . . can't be crazy! God, it's been a nightmare. Been next to the plane ever since. Didn't dare separate."

Then the rest of them had gotten courage enough to come beside Marshall, were surrounding him, all of them babbling in wild hysteria, their faces white with ghastly fear. And Marshall, piecing the story together as swiftly as he could, got the entire picture. Primarily, the robot was still in the vicinity, Sally was still alive—and *both had disappeared toward that mine on the side of the mountain ridge!*

Dan Marshall didn't hesitate, he took instant command of the situation. His words lashed the frightened group into a dull, completely bewildered subservience.

Three male passengers and the pilot carried the co-pilot, who had a broken leg, back to the truck, while the stewardess shepherded the others—a little girl and four women—along also. They left them in the truck, while the three men, with Marshall's aid and direction, unloaded the mobile equipment from

the back of the tiny vehicle. They were dazed, all of them, and uncomprehending.

"We'll have to carry it back to the clearing, up the side of that mountain ridge to the deserted mine shaft!" Marshall snapped.

"But, wha—" the pilot began.

"The girl, you fool," Marshall's voice was harsh with the anxiety that tore at him. "She's up there, and that 'thing' you saw is up there too. We're going after. And I'm going to need this equipment badly!"

The pilot seemed about to protest no further, but one of the three male passengers, a bald, fat little man, squealed indignation. And suddenly the pilot had him by the lapels, shaking him violently. "You heard him," he grated. "We're all pitching in. Let's get going!"

Dan Marshall had time for one brief, humorless grin of thanks, then, as swiftly as they could move under their burdens, the little group started through the forest underbrush and back to the clearing and the wreckage. Marshall led the way, now, with the pilot directly behind him.

They were across the clearing, past the crumpled hulk of the airliner, and starting up the mountain ridge that led to the deserted mine. Somewhere up there, Dan Marshall knew, the metal robot monster sought Sally O'Neill.

AND then they stood on the ridge, all of them breathing heavily from their exertions, looking right and left in apprehension. But Marshall hadn't hesitated. The gaping opening that marked the entrance to the mine seemed to beckon, and even as he approached it he heard a faint, distant crackling coming from its darkened recesses. The radio robot was in there, and so, therefore, was Sally!

Marshall turned to shout to the others, but his mouth had half-opened when there came another, louder and more ominous sound from the shaft. A distant rumbling, increasing in volume as it swept along to the throat of the tunnel—a CAVE IN!

Face white with sudden, terrible apprehension, Marshall shouted to the pilot.

"For God's sake, get over here with the stuff! They're in there!"

The rumble had grown fainter, but Marshall thought he could still hear rock falling inside the tunnel. He caught the choking breath of ore dust that rushed out at him. While the others brought the equipment to the mouth of the mine tunnel, Marshall worked swiftly, desperately, reeling out foot after foot of portable microphone wire—fighting off the terrible premonitions that seared his mind.

Then, flashlight in hand, microphone strapped to his chest, Dan Marshall turned to the others. "Whatever happens, wait here," he ordered. "If I don't come out—you'll know what to do!"

And with that, Marshall stepped into the inky tunnel, snapping his flashlight, throwing its rays down the long slope. For his first ten strides, the searching white finger revealed nothing. Revealed nothing as a sudden pounding reverberated from back in the tunnel. Then, as Marshall cried aloud in a hysteria of relief, the flashlight's ray caught Sally!

The girl was on the floor of the shaft, lying perhaps a hundred feet ahead, pinned back against the water-soaked walls by a thick, heavy prop beam!

For an awful moment this scene stamped itself on Marshall's brain like some nightmarish panorama. Then he saw more. The girl was unconscious, and lay limply twisted beneath the

weight of the huge wooden beam. But behind her, less than two hundred feet, was the place where the cave-in had occurred—the place from which even now the thunderous pounding was coming!

And through the debris of stone and buckled timber proppings, on the other side of that cave-in—was the floating radio robot! Marshall saw faint sparks and heard angry crackling as the creature hurled itself again and again in prodigious efforts to break through the slag slide to where they were!

Now Marshall was beside the girl, while the monster continued to rain great blows on the debris which blocked him off. Marshall had Sally's head cradled in his arms, and was sobbing half-hysterically in relief as he realized she was still alive. The shock, the fright, perhaps a blow from the falling beam, had stunned her into unconsciousness. But she was still alive!

The hammering of the monster grew louder, and looking up wildly, Marshall saw that the timbers blocking the creature's path were slowly giving way before the terrific assault! The radio monstrosity was breaking through!

The crackling static-like flashes were increasing in a sort of frenzied fury as the thing gained progress, inch-by-inch, through the block-off!

Frantically, Marshall bent over the girl. But in an instant he saw that it would take the efforts of three men to move the beam from her. And then, suddenly, he remembered the microphone strapped to his chest. His scheme — But, even as he thought of it, even as the momentarily forgotten plan returned to him, he knew it was now useless!

Useless, because it had depended on the voice of Sally O'Neill—and now Sally lay inertly in his arms, unable to utter a word, let alone the note that was their one weapon against the monster!

MARSHALL bit savagely into his lower lip, cursing the Gods of Fate that had done this to him, the terrible mocking Fate that grinned evilly down on them in challenge to avert the menace that would destroy them both before another minute had passed.

"Sally, Sally," he sobbed desperately. "Oh God, girl, I can't get you out of this I—" his voice broke off, and he drew her head to his chest.

At that instant, even as Marshall's horrified gaze saw the crackling monster shatter the last of the debris that had been holding it off, Sally O'Neill stirred. Stirred, and moved her head back to look dazedly up into the face of Dan Marshall—and in the next instant to look toward the hammering, crackling monster.

As the thing smashed through the last of the barrier, and hung suspended like some glowing, horrible picture of Death—Sally O'Neill screamed shrilly!

The next scene would be stamped on Dan Marshall's memory through eternity. There was a vast, roaring, ear-splitting, tremendous detonation. Splashes of static flame shot everywhere along the shaft, blinding in the lightning-like vividness of them. The floating monster, engulfed in the vortex of this holocaust disintegrated into a myriad shower of blazing sparks. And then—all was black . . .

SALLY WAS SOBBING against Dan Marshall's chest. "Don't worry, darling," he said gently, "it's all over now. He's gone, forever destroyed. There'll be no more radio robot—ever."

Sally shuddered. "But my scream, you said my scream was responsible—" she began.

Marshall broke in: "That scream hit precisely the same pitch as the high note in the aria. And it was through that high note that I'd intended to hurl the

monster back into the ether. The telephone voice-scrambling device I brought in the truck from the station took care of the rest. It hurled the pieces of the creature into a thousand different aerial waves."

But Sally O'Neill, ever the woman, was losing interest in the explanation. Obviously, she was far more concerned with the man who held her in his arms—the man who stopped talking now to kiss her again.

OUR LORD, THE SUN

By Joseph J. Millard

Modern meteorologists are inclined to scoff at the effect of sunspots on weather. Are they wrong? Does this solar phenomenon influence weather and other conditions on Earth?

A BELIEF in Astrology—the influence of the heavenly bodies on human lives and destinies—goes back to the dawn of recorded history. Similarly, the worship of the Sun as the Lord of Creation is one of the oldest and commonest forms of religion known to the human race.

But during the first decades of this "enlightened" Twentieth Century, science and the average man, alike, have laughed at such primitive beliefs. It is natural, they have remarked, that the childish minds of uncivilized peoples should pick out the sun and moon and stars as objects of worship and should imagine these heavenly bodies possessed of supernal powers.

Now, suddenly, science has stopped laughing. In the light of modern discoveries, the old beliefs don't seem quite so infantile after all.

A hundred years ago, a researcher by the name of S. H. Schwabe began to make a study of sunspots—those weird hurricanes that sweep across the molten face of the sun. In 1843, Schwabe published a book proving that sunspots appear in cycles, with approximately eleven or twelve years elapsing between a period of minimum sunspots and the maximum. After that, slowly but with increasing momentum, science began to interest itself in the effect on the earth of these gaseous hurricanes that often cover billions of square miles on the sun's surface.

Naturally, the first interest was in a possible connection between sunspots and weather, for the sun is largely responsible for our weather changes and climate. Be-

fore long, researchers had made the astounding discovery that back through the centuries there have been regular periods of flood and drought and that these periods correspond startlingly to periods of sunspot activity. With this announcement, new minds attacked the subject.

Professor A. Tchijevsky, a Russian scientist, startled the American Meteorological Society with evidence that the great mass upheavals of humanity back through the ages have also corresponded closely with sunspot cycles. Wars, revolutions, riots, unrest of all kinds that seems to seize humanity at intervals, was found to follow a cycle quite close to the sunspots.

At the University of Arizona, Professor A. E. Douglas became interested in the possible relationship between sunspots and plant life. Gradually his interest centered on tree-rings, those concentric circles in the cross section of a tree that show how many years it has been growing. His interest centered on the queer fact that these rings were far apart for a while, showing years of heavy growth, and then tightly-packed as though for several years the tree scarcely grew at all. With painstaking thoroughness, he began to check back on sections of ancient trees.

When he had records of tree growth going back as far as 3200 years, he was astounded to find that periods of growth closely followed sunspot cycles. But one thing bothered him.

For the years between 1645 and 1715, there was almost no indication of sunspot effect. For a time he despaired, thinking

that his theory was a failure. Then, early in 1922, out of a clear sky he received word from a Professor Maunder of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England, bearing the astounding news that his study of sunspots showed that between 1645 and 1715, there were almost no spots recorded. He knew nothing of the secret problem troubling Professor Douglas and, in turn, thought perhaps his own observations had failed. But the two discoveries, when put together, formed striking evidence that sunspots do control the growth of plant life.

Today hundreds of scientists are engaged in comparing sunspot cycles with human affairs back through the ages. And the results, while still meager, are sensational.

It has been found by Professor H. Fritz, who made a study back as far as the year 188 A.D. that the best vintages of wine comes from years closely following sunspot maxima. Some of the world's most famous wine vintages came from years when the greatest sunspot activities were recorded.

Another strange discovery came in checking the records of the Hudson Bay Company. It was found that the number of pelts of fur-bearing animals sold to the Trading Posts varied with sunspot cycles. From 1850 to 1900, the largest number of rabbit hides gathered by trappers occurred in years when there was the fewest number of sunspots. Just recently, the University of Wisconsin has released evidence that ties in the migration of birds with the sunspot cycles.

Everyone knows the effect of sunspots on radio, telegraph and telephone communications. Apparently sunspots create vast magnetic storms that sweep the earth, disrupting communications and seriously affecting electrical instruments. A study of the sunspots and radio operations indicate that the years of 1942 and 1943, when sunspots will again be at a minimum, will be particularly good years for reception of regular broadcasting but not so good for short wave programs.

Charts have been produced by numerous researchers to show that business and the stock market boom during periods of great sunspot activity but fall off when there is a sunspot minimum. As early as 1878 a British economist, W. S. Jevons, prepared a paper linking the queer cycles of boom and depression with the sunspots. Dr. Huntington of Yale University has produced some startling relationships between

sunspots and human health and behavior.

At the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, it has been shown that the panic of 1903-04, the prewar depression of 1913-14 and the postwar depressions as well as our more current ones, followed the cyclonic disturbances of Old Sol. Oddly, the production and sale of automobiles, the building industry and even the number of new incorporations recorded all parallel sunspot cycles with amazing closeness.

A number of meteorologists have turned to a comparison of sunspots with world weather conditions. Here again, remarkable parallels are apparent which are far too general to be considered mere coincidence. However, there is one queer factor which has investigators puzzled. Apparently sunspots and weather conditions march closely in step for years and then, for no known reason, they fall completely apart for a short time. Then, once more the two phenomena follow one another. Why this is so, no one has yet learned.

One of the most unusual effects of sunspots has been a tendency for the magnetic north pole of our earth to wander off during sunspot storms. Recently, during a particularly bad outbreak of sunspots, the magnetic north pole moved almost a whole degree away from its recorded position.

There have been many other startling—even sensational—results of this new study of sunspots. But until scientists have proven and re-proven their discoveries over and over, they will not go so far as to actually announce these discoveries as definite facts. But it is fairly certain that when another ten or fifteen years of research has been added to the present knowledge of sunspot effects, we shall know a lot more about our own lives than we do now.

The sun has always been important in astrological calculations. When science has at last definitely proven to its own satisfaction that we are what we are because of mysterious forces released upon us from the sun, they will have accepted one small part of astrology's claim.

And who knows but what science may some day go beyond their solar investigations? Perhaps in the future, when the riddles of the sun have been laid bare, they may go on to farther stars and planets to discover that astrology has been right for some 50,000 years or more . . .

That mankind really is guided and influenced by the stars in their courses.

The DYNAMOUSE



BY WM. P. MCGIVERN

MY City Editor—I shag a news beat for the *Chicago Blade*—crooked a finger at my desk one fine autumnal morning, and belloyed coyly in my direction.

“Hoskins!” he screamed. “C’mere!”

Much against my will, I took my feet down off the desk and came. “Okay, Boss,” I said rubbing the sleep from my baby blue eyes, “what’s on the fire?”

“That old nut on Lake Street, Professor What’s-iz-name,” my Hero began.

“Professor Waldo?” I suggested.

“Yeah, Professor Waldo, the old goof who’s been blowing the roof off his Lake Street lab with monotonous regularity,” said my Charming Chieftain. “He just called.”

“Well,” I said cheerfully, “that’s decent of him. Was it a social call, or strictly for fun?”

My Master ignored the last remark. “He just called,” he went on, “to tell me that he wants a reporter over at his lab, pronto. Says he’s got some hot news for us.”

“Possibly he’s discovered a way to blow the roof off the Tribune Tower,” I suggested hopefully.

The Leader didn’t even smile. “G’wan over there,” he growled.

I departed.

To tell you the truth, I wasn’t terribly concerned as I hopped into a cab—at the *Blade’s* expense—and gave the driver a Lake Street address. I had been to old Professor Waldo’s laboratory no less than six times in the last two weeks. Times when the old zaney had literally blasted the roof off his laboratory while fiddling around with some experiment. It had made good copy, but it was beginning to lose its zest.

Nellie was only a playful mouse, but she had the power to utterly destroy all of Chicago!

However, the old duck must have taken a liking to me, or to the sheet. For when the other papers had made him look pretty silly, the *Blade* had given him a break. I'd written the yarns. Maybe that was why, when he thought he had some hot news, he'd call us first, and ask for me.

I was pretty certain, nevertheless, that this news wasn't going to be much news.

Five minutes after I'd hopped into the cab, I was punching the doorbell of Waldo's Lake Street lab, still certain that the whole thing was going to be pretty dull.

The Professor himself let me in. I've told you what he looks like. Thin, with rapidly disappearing white hair, stoop-shoulders and a vague look in his watery eyes.

"Come in," he said. "Come right in, Mr. Hoskins."

I stepped into the lab, slightly flattered that he'd remembered my monicker, and tossed my fedora on a nearby table.

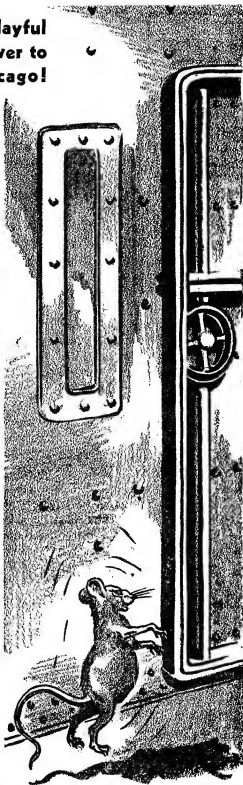
"Well, Prof," I began, "what's the sensational disclosure?"

"My experiment," Waldo said excitedly, "has been completed!"

"Well," I declared. "Well!"

"If you'll excuse me for a moment," he continued, obviously in a dither of excitement, "I'll just step into the back for a minute." Then he darted through a door leading to the rear of the lab, and I found myself alone, wondering what this was going to be about.

FISHING for a cigarette, I rested my chassis on one of the laboratory ta-



bles, looking around the place as I did. As I said, I'd been here six times before. Aside from patches in the ceiling, the place hadn't been altered any. Tables, gadgets, tubes, and a cage with two white mice in it in the corner.

I'd mentioned the white mice in my story of the previous lab explosions. Mentioned the old duck's attachment to them, and the fact that he had names for them both—Nellie and Nicky.

So I climbed off the table and moved over in front of the cage. They were cute little devils, and Nellie seemed almost human. I'd be willing to swear that there was recognition in her pink eyes as I stood before the cage.

"Hi, Nellie," I said by way of greeting. And she put her forepaws against the door of the cage in response. Nicky moved over to a corner of the cage, jealously sulking.

"How's the kid?" I inquired, and Nellie arched her tail to show me she felt fine.

I turned from the cage. Old Waldo usually ate his lunches right in the laboratory, and maybe there would be some scraps lying around. Nellie went for scraps.

There didn't seem to be any, and I was turning back to the cage in disappointment, when my eye caught exactly what I, or Nellie, wanted—a piece of cheese.

It was lying on a black board beneath a series of bulbs and wires. Not a big piece of cheese. Maybe half the size of an ice cube. Waldo must have been munching it while he tinkered with his machines. However, cheese was cheese, and if I wanted to please a lady mouse I'd have to feed her.

"Here, kid," I said a moment later, lifting the door of her cage, "have a bite on me." I put the piece of cheese of the floor in front of the door, and Nellie moved forward to nibble it.

That was another thing about Waldo's mice. They were so tame they were darned near domestic. You could open the cage door any time you wanted to, and they'd stay put. Never thought to make a break for it. Probably never wanted to.

So Nellie was half out of her cage, munching her cheese and looking up gratefully at me every so often.

At which time, Professor Waldo flurried back into the room.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hoskins," he said. "There were several phone calls I had to make. However, I've finished them and—"

"That's okay," I broke in. "Nellie was entertaining me in your absence."

Professor Waldo broke into a fond smile, like a father who's been told his idiot son is in line for a Pulitzer Award.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Nellie. A fine mouse, Nellie. So very intelligent." Then his brow clouded. "But what was it that we were talking about?" He put a thin finger to his long nose.

"Your news tip, Professor," I reminded him. "You said that you'd completed your experiment."

"Ahhhh," his face broke into excited wrinkles. "Of course, Mr. Hoskins. Of course! My experiment. I have completed it. Sit down, sir. Sit down, and I'll tell you."

He was in such a state, I saw, that his hands were trembling. I think, too, that his eyes were even more moisty than usual. Pride, I guess. Probably I was the first person in whom he was confiding his big secret.

"Mr. Hoskins," he said shakily, when I'd sprawled into a straight chair. "Mr. Hoskins, I've harnessed U-235!"

I SPRAWLED out of the chair and onto my feet in one explosive movement.

"Whaaaat!"

Waldo's face was shining, and his words were tumbling forth a mile a minute. "That's what I was working on. But I couldn't tell a soul. That's why I was so grateful when you and your newspaper didn't sneer at me the way the others did. I was trying to harness the most explosive, the most tremendous force man has ever known!"

"Good Lord, Professor!" My hand was digging futilely into my inner coat pocket in search for a pencil and paper. And as usual, I had neither. I could see, from the gleam in the old man's watery eyes, that this was no pipe dream. He was, after all, a fairly reputable figure in science.

"All other scientists have been trying to harness U-235 in natural elements," he babbled on. "I tried that for some time, finally giving it up. I turned to chemical harnessing. Tried all sorts of combinations. But, as incredible as it sounds, I stumbled on the solution through sheer accident. It happened one afternoon, when I was eating lunch."

I'd picked up a pencil and scratch pad from one of Waldo's tables, and was trying to get it down with all the excited drama that he was unconsciously putting into it.

"Part of my lunch fell into a chemical vat, in which I'd been exploding neutrons. That gave me my solution, as I was fishing it out . . ."

There was more, detailed, and scientific, and I got most of it down. Then: "Not only was I able to harness U-235," Waldo went on, "but I found that I'd added another power to the stuff. I'd conceived an explosive so great, so powerful, that one gram of it would destroy an entire city!"

"Good Lord, Prof," I burst forth. "This is tremendous! What in the dev—"

He cut me short. "You'd never believe the substance in which I harnessed this incredible explosive force. Harnessed no less than four grams of my solution! You'd never believe it." His eyes gleamed.

"What?" My curiosity and excitement was eating me alive.

"In cheese!" He stood up, raising his arm dramatically, and swinging to point to a machine. A machine which was a series of bulbs and wires above a black board. "In the tiny scrap of cheese you see on that board!"

Even as my eyes followed his gesture, taking in the machine and the empty board, my stomach did a series of swift, horribly unpleasant flip-flops. The cheese to which he thought he was pointing, the tiny little morsel of food containing enough explosive force to tear apart four vast cities, was the tidbit I had placed in front of Nellie's cage!

"GLUG!" I managed to get out. "Glug!" And I wheeled in frantic terror to face the mouse cage.

Waldo's rheumy gaze had finally focused on the board, and he was now aware that the cheese was no longer resting there. In a voice that was a combination croak and squeal he screeched, "The cheese—it's gone!"

Somehow, I was able to speak. Or I might say that, somehow, I heard my voice making sounds. For I was looking at the cage. The cage with *one* mouse, Nicky, and an open door—and *no cheese!*

"I fed it to Nellie," I bumbled, "and she's gone!"

Waldo had grabbed my arm, and was looking up at me with an expression of stark terror. "No," he gasped. "This is a joke. You didn't!"

Then, from the equally frenzied mask on my pan, he must have gotten

his answer—that it wasn't any joke, and that Nellie had eaten the cheese, for he said, "Ohhhhhh!" in a hysterically helpless way.

"Where did Nellie go?" I asked, knowing perfectly well that he had no more idea than I did. And then, in the next instant, I caught sight of Nell—or rather of her white tail. For she had just darted out the half-opened door of the laboratory!

"There she is!" Waldo and I screamed simultaneously, and we dove together, sprawling over on the floor as we both tried to dash in the same direction at the same time.

Somehow we picked ourselves up from the floor, realizing that Nellie had gained a precious head start on us, and dashed through the laboratory door.

Hurling down the laboratory steps leading to the street, I saw with a shock that the door at the bottom of the stairs had also been left ajar, and that Nellie was no longer visible.

"She must be out on the street!" Waldo gasped right behind my ear. Then we were out the door, on the sidewalk, looking up and down Lake Street, while a street car clanged by, trying to catch a glimpse of Nellie.

The traffic was heavy, and the very noise of it made me cringe, thinking of Nellie, who might at that moment be darting around under the wheels of trucks. Darting around with enough explosives to knock the sides out of the Grand Canyon.

Then Waldo shouted, and I turned, looking in the direction of his pointing finger. There was Nellie again, perhaps thirty feet down the sidewalk!

"Nellie!" I croaked.

"Nellie!" Waldo rasped in echo.

And at that moment, as we dashed after her, someone opened a door from the inside—a door just off the sidewalk beside Nellie, a saloon door.

Before I could even gasp, Nellie had darted into the saloon, narrowly missing the swing of the door as it closed on her.

BY the time Waldo and I had barged into the saloon, the place was in an uproar. Four women stood atop tables, and two clung to their bar stools, screaming their lungs out. Nellie's entrance had not gone unnoticed.

Somehow I found a split second in which to wonder what their reactions would be if they knew the cargo Nellie carried in her pink tummy. And then we were pushing through the melee in the barroom, screaming at people to stand back.

A big, beefy red-faced man had come out from behind the bar, bellowing lustily and carrying a bung-starter in his hand. His apron spotted him as the barkeep.

"Get that damned animal!" he shouted. "I'll bash its brains out." Then he saw us and wheeled. "Do you own that blank-blank rat?" he thundered.

"No, you damned fool, we're just out for exercise!" I shouted back. Nellie, who had taken a swift, devious course under the tables, was headed for an open trap door, leading into a sort of cellar.

The barkeep swore roundly as we plowed by him. Nellie was now definitely flipping down the steps into the cellar. We were right behind, and from the noise on the steps the barkeep was right behind us.

Someone had flicked a button upstairs, for the blackness of the cellar was suddenly illuminated, and we were looking down on rows of casks. The place was a wine cellar.

Then we were all down in the cellar, the barkeep, still thundering challenges

to Nellie, behind us. "I'll get that blank, blank rat, blast his hide!"

"He's not a him, he's a her!" I snapped, "and if you don't get the devil back upstairs, we'll never be able to coax her out." By "out" I meant that Nellie had now crawled far back behind some vast casks in the corner of the cellar, and was no longer visible.

Waldo was standing in front of these casks, cooing, "Nell, Nellie. Ohhhhhh, Nellie. Come out, come out, wherever you are!" It sounded so foolish that I almost forgot about the explosives still resting in her tummy. For a moment I started to laugh. But then the bartender barged past me, waving his bung-starter like a club.

And before I could open my mouth, he had pushed Waldo aside and was trying to climb over the barrels of wine in an effort to smash Nellie's brains out—and incidentally blow all of us, and over three million others, into eternity.

It was more than I could stand. Realizing that I wouldn't look well in pieces, I grabbed the nearest thing I could, an iron funnel, and moved up behind the beefy barkeep.

Once down on his thick skull was all that was necessary to calm him for a bit. He rolled, totally out, off the casks over which he'd been trying to clamber.

"Like a light," I muttered in satisfaction, then peered over the casks, Waldo once more at my shoulder, in an effort to see Nellie.

"Good Lord!" Waldo gasped, taking the sentiments, slightly censored, out of my mouth. For there was Nellie, at a dripping spigot on a cask just beyond us—sopping up whiskey!

SHE was standing on her hind legs, her forepaws clasped affectionately around the head of the spigot, and her

tail swaying back and forth in drunken happiness!

"Nellie!" I shouted. "Get away from that tap!"

She turned her head slightly, looking owlishly with her pink eyes. And I swear to this day, believe it or not, that she winked at us! Then her front paws dropped, and she staggered back tipsily—still tantalizingly out of reach.

"Now we *won't* be able to reason with her!" Waldo was moaning over and over again. "We won't be able to reason with her!"

"She's stinko," I agreed. "Utterly plastered!"

I had turned to gaze at the Professor, and he had turned beseechingly toward me, neither of us knowing what to do next. And when we turned our heads back to Nellie, she was gone again!

With her destructive burden of U-235, Nellie had vanished into thin air.

I glared wildly about the dank cellar. The Professor was on his hands and knees, peering under wine barrels, making clucking noises with his throat in a vain attempt to lure Nellie out into the open.

Then I noticed the door. It led from the cellar up a short flight of stairs and into the alley. It was ajar, and in our excitement we had overlooked it.

I jerked the Professor to his feet. "Come on," I yelled. "Nellie must have ducked into the alley!"

We emerged into the alley less than ten seconds later. Emerged to see a heavy, ten ton truck pulling away from the back of our tavern. Lettered on the tailgate was the cheerless warning: DANGER, HIGH EXPLOSIVES.

The Professor's hand clawed at my arm, jerked me around. His watery eyes were fastened on the back of the truck. "N—n-nellie!" he blurted.

"N—n-nellie, I—,"

I shook him hard. "You sound like a broken record. What is it? Get in the groove!"

"I saw Nellie," Waldo croaked hysterically. "She climbed a rope leading to the tailgate of that truck. Then she crawled inside!"

My knees started knocking like castinets. Nellie in a truckload of high explosives—with a bellyful of liquor saturated U-235!

My reaction was instantaneous—and sound. "Come on," I jerked Waldo's arm. "Let's scam. When that explosion comes we don't want to hear it. We want to hear *about* it!"

"No!" Waldo jerked his arm free, and for a moment he stood there looking like a reproduced painting of Horatius At The Bridge. "No!" he repeated, his voice horrified. "You can't be serious. Millions of innocent people might suffer if we shirk our duty. We have to find Nellie. We have to prevent that explosive in her stomach from becoming active!"

"Active?" I snorted. "The year's winner for understatement." But I knew I'd have to give in. The Professor was looking at me like a recruiting sign with Uncle Sam saying, "I Want Youse!"

"Okay," I snapped. "I'm with you. This is either going to be my biggest story or my last. Maybe both."

WE didn't waste any time. In thirty seconds we had whipped over to the street intersection, and in another ten seconds had flagged a cab and crawled inside.

A block ahead of us the wide rear of the truck containing Nellie and the dynamite—not to mention the U-235—was still visible, rumbling away from us.

"Follow that truck up ahead! See

it?" I yelled to the driver.

The cabbie grinned over his shoulder. "Hell, it'll be a snap. That's a construction truck headed for the Lake Street Subway shaft, carrying dynamite." He paused. "It carries explosives," he repeated.

"You're telling me," I muttered.

It was only a matter of four minutes later when we arrived at the Lake Street shaft. A gang of sand hogs was unloading sacks of blasting powder from the truck, which had arrived before us. Both Waldo and I tumbled out of the cab like candidates for an acrobatic troupe, and in a second had raced to the back of the truck.

"Hold it!" I hollered. "Hold it! Hold it!"

A huge red-headed fellow who had been unloading the stuff from the tailgate suddenly paused, putting his hands on hips. "Whatsa matta?" he asked.

"Look," I said excitedly, "Did you see a mouse around here?"

The red head looked at me curiously for an instant and then his face hardened grimly. "You're rushing the season," he snapped. "April Fool's Day is still a couple weeks off. Now clear out of here before I have you and your buddy thrown in the brig for trespassing. And make it snappy. We're getting ready to blast."

"Now wait a minute," I yelled, "I'm no practical joker, I'm serious."

"So am I Bud," the red head said menacingly, "and if you don't get moving, I'm—"

"Look," I cut in, "I'm a news reporter. Hoskins of the *Blade*." I whipped out my press card and shoved it under his nose. "Does this mean anything to you? This man," I jerked a thumb at the Professor, "is Professor Waldo of the Chicago Foundation. The mouse we're looking for escaped from his laboratory. We've got to find that

mouse or the entire city might be destroyed. It sounds silly man, but it's the truth."

The red head scratched his head uncertainly.

"All right," he grumbled, "I still ain't convinced but you can look in the truck. It's empty now, anyway."

He was right. It didn't take a second glance to see that the roomy inside of the truck was quite empty. Neither did it take a second glance to tell us that there was no sign of Nellie. I turned to the Professor despairingly. "Are you sure you saw her?" I asked desperately.

Professor Waldo looked helplessly into the empty truck. "I swear it," he whispered hoarsely, "just as sure as I'm alive I saw Nellie climb into this truck."

I was licked. The elevator had disappeared into the shaft carrying men and explosives down to the subway tunnel. The truck was empty, there was no trace of Nellie and I was uncomfortably aware of the red head's suspicious glance.

"All right," he growled finally, "you guys have had your look, now get moving. They're setting the charges down there now and in a few minutes we'll be blasting. And I got my orders to keep these streets clear. So start rollin'."

I turned to Waldo and shrugged hopelessly. "We did our best," I said. "It's in the lap of the gods now."

I felt sorry as hell for the old duck. His face was as white as chalk and his eyes were staring wildly. I could see that it was costing him a lot to keep from giving in to the hysteria that must have been gnawing at his self control.

"I can't quit," he cried hoarsely, "I can't. She must be somewhere. I've got to find her, do you hear me? I've got to find her."

THERE wasn't anything I could do and still I felt like hell. I heard a rumbling noise behind me and I saw the elevator rising in the shaft. I grabbed the Professor by the arm. "We can't do anything," I said, "and our time is up. They're going to blasting here in a few minutes."

"And I don't mean maybe, chum," the red head put in, "so take your friend's advice and clear out." He looked at us both disgustedly for a minute and then turned away shaking his head.

"Mice," I heard him mutter to himself.

The workers and sandhogs were clambering off the elevator, and several of them were stringing along a coil of wire, an end of which ran down the shaft. I knew they meant business when I saw the blasting wire so I grabbed the Professor and started to hustle him away.

We had not gone more than six feet when I heard something that pounded into my eardrums with the force of a pile driver. For a split instant I was too stunned to act. When I did come to, I wheeled and raced back to the group of sandhogs who were assembling their equipment, preparatory to moving out of blasting range.

"Which one of you said it?" I shouted breathlessly, "which one of you said you saw it?"

"Saw what?" one of them asked.

"The mouse," I shrieked. "I heard someone say he saw a mouse. In the name of heaven who was it?"

"Me," a stocky, black haired fellow answered belligerently. "Want to make somethin' out of it?"

"Where'd you see it?" I tried unsuccessfully to keep the hysteria out of my voice.

"Down in the blastin' chamber," the sandhog evidently decided he was hu-

moring a nut. "I tink he must have rode down wit us in de elevator. Any-way I'd just set fuses in the blasting chamber when I sees this little fellow running around. I tried to catch him . . ."

"Her," I corrected automatically.

"I didn't notice," my informant snapped with heavy sarcasm, "I think there was somethin' wrong wit her. She kept staggering around like as if she was tipsy and I couldn't catch her. Don't waste time worrying about her cause in just about six minutes all her troubles are goin' to be over. She'll go out wit a bang, all right." He grinned widely and nudged a fellow worker, "Get it? Out with a bang."

I tried desperately to keep calm. Six minutes left. There was still time. "Professor," I yelled.

I looked around and he was standing right behind me. One look at his face and I knew he knew the whole story. I didn't waste words with him but I hurried to the red head, who seemed to be some kind of straw boss.

"Did you hear that?" I yelled at him. "The mouse is in the shaft, in the blasting chamber. You've got to postpone your blasting until we get her out."

"Oh is that so?" his voice was almost a whisper. "Well get this. You loonies have caused me enough trouble today. I got a schedule to keep up and I ain't falling behind to accommodate any mouse." He looked me up and down and added sarcastically, "or any rat either for that matter."

I wavered for a split second and then with a silent prayer to whoever it is protects fools and drunkards, I let go with an uppercut that started from my shoelaces.

HE staggered back with a bellow of rage, but before he recovered his balance I was streaking for the elevator

shaft, yelling my head off for the Professor. Waldo heard me and started running, reaching the elevator shaft before I did. I saw him jerk the descent cable, then the elevator started down and I jumped.

I dropped into the shaft, hit the elevator floor with a healthy smack and tumbled forward on my face. When I turned over and looked up I saw the baffled faces of the tunnel workers ringed around the shaft opening.

"Come back here," the red head roared, "you crazy fools! There's a hundred pound charge of dynamite ready to blow down there."

A hundred pounds of dynamite! A mere bagatelle compared to the half ounce of U-235 that Nellie was carting around in her rum-soaked interior.

The elevator stopped with a slight jar and the Professor and I hurried into the tunnel. It wasn't actually the tunnel, just a roomy underground chamber that served as a storehouse for heavy equipment. The tunnel itself led from this room. I grabbed a flashlight and raced into the blackness. The Professor was right behind me and we hadn't traveled twenty feet before we collided with a heavy steel plate that completely blocked off the tunnel.

"I was afraid of this," I groaned, "They're blasting here. Nellie's inside and we can't get to her."

I swung the light around and saw that the Professor was groping around on his hand and knees, grunting and muttering to himself.

"Listen," I cried wildly, "You're wasting your time. Nellie's inside here. What are you—"

The Professor straightened up and smiled. "I was merely disconnecting the electric fuse that leads to the blasting chamber. With those wires disconnected we only have to worry about one explosion."

"Oh," I said, and then because I felt that this was slightly inadequate, I added, "Oh."

The Professor rubbed his hands together briskly. For the first time since the hectic moment when we had discovered the absence of Nellie, he seemed cheerful.

"It's a blessing," he said, "that Nellie chose this chamber to hide herself. We have her locked in the blasting chamber and all we have to do is get her out."

"Sure," he said dubiously, "that's all there is to it."

I turned and looked at the heavy steel sheeting that separated us from the blasting chamber, and noticed for the first time an observation window of heavy wired glass that was set in the steel plating at just about eye level. The Professor noticed it too and without wasting any more time we pressed our noses against the glass and peered into the blasting chamber. The chamber was lighted with some kind of wall lights that cast a flickering illumination over the rocky walls and arched roof.

"There she is," the Professor suddenly shouted. He was trembling with excitement as he strained closer to the thick glass. "It's Nellie," he cried wildly, "We've found her."

"I don't like to be a wet blanket," I said, "but I don't see her."

"Well don't worry," Waldo said confidently, "You will. I can't see her clearly myself because she's in the shadow. But—wait—she's moving now, you'll be able to see her." His voice rose with happy excitement. "Look," he cried, "there she— My God!" His voice broke into an incredulous, hysterical babble and he staggered back from the window, his hands pressed to his eyes.

THE sound of his voice made my stomach do a flip flop. I was peer-

ing wildly through the window in an instant.

The sight that presented itself to my pop eyes was truly shocking. Nellie was stretched out on the floor, her dainty feet pawing the air. And no wonder. Her whole body was swollen to three times its normal size. She looked like a fur bearing football, blown up to the bursting point. She was obviously amazed at what had happened to her for her tiny head lolled from side to side to get a better view of her gargantuan proportions.

My mouth opened and closed wordlessly. I turned to the Professor and managed to stammer, "W-w-what is it? What's the matter with her?"

The Professor had recovered to some extent and now he grabbed me suddenly by the shoulders and pushed me away from the blasting chamber. "Run," he cried, "Save yourself while there's still time. Hurry, my boy, don't wait for me. Save yourself."

"What's the rush?" I gasped.

"Didn't you see Nellie?" he demanded wildly. "Her swollen, bloated appearance."

"Well, yes," I admitted, "but I thought, well you know, I just figured," I floundered lamely "just let Nature take its course."

"Oh ye Gods," he exploded. "That isn't nature doing that to her—it's U-235!"

"It's becoming active," he continued swiftly, "Minute particles of energy, electron volts, are emitting from the U-235 in her belly. Not in sufficient quantity to detonate the rest, or to destroy Nellie, but sufficient to extend the walls and to cause that bloated appearance. It's just a matter of minutes until the complete force of the U-235 is released and that means total destruction. Nellie, the subway and anything within a mile radius of here will be blown to bits.

Now do you understand why you've got to clear out?"

I started to reply and then I closed my mouth and looked over my shoulder. The elevator was rising, evidently operated from above.

"It's a hundred feet to the top of the shaft," I said, "and the elevator is gone. I can't jump as high as I used to."

The Professor wrung his hands in desperation. "I can't let you sacrifice yourself. You've got to make an attempt to save yourself. Already it may be too late. The complete force of the U-235 may release itself any instant. There's nothing to hold it in check. Under normal circumstances it would have reached total activity some time ago."

Then I heard a mighty encouraging sound. The elevator starting back again. Over the Professor's protests I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him to the shaft. The car came into sight and with it came our buddy, the red head, and a lean erect old man, with snapping gray eyes and a mouth like a bear trap.

"I'm Ericson," he snapped, stepping from the elevator, "Construction chief on this job. Now what's the idea of you men holding up this blast?"

The red head was moving toward me but he stopped when I stooped down and picked up a spike maul and nonchalantly twirled it around my head.

Then the Professor was talking and the belligerent look on Ericson's face faded to one of astonishment. For the next few minutes the air was blue with formulae, symbols, equations, figures, technical terms and about thirty dozen references to U-235.

WHEN he finished talking the lines on Ericson's forehead had deepened to thick wrinkles that spread like wings over his eyes. Without saying a

word he walked to the window and peered in at Nellie. When he turned to us again his face was grave and haggard.

"It's monstrous," he spoke with an effort. "The city must be warned. No time can be lost. Evacuation of this area must begin at once. Under normal circumstances, from what you've told me, the U-235 would already have released its energy."

I started to follow them from the tunnel when something the Professor had said, and Ericson had just repeated stuck in my mind.

Under normal circumstances!

They had both used that phrase. They had both said that under normal circumstances Nellie would have been blown to smithereens long before this. I'm no scientist but even the cops will admit I'm a pretty fair amateur detective.

"Professor," I yelled, "Mr. Ericson—wait a minute." I dashed after them, a wild goofy idea popping around in my head. I grabbed Ericson first. "What is there in that blasting chamber," I asked, "that is different from outside, or normal conditions?"

"Nothing," he answered a trifle irritably, "Nothing, that is, except greater air pressure."

I almost passed out right then from sheer shock at having guessed right. "Can you," I asked shakily, "increase that air pressure?"

"Yes," he barked, "but what in hades—"

"You'll see," I snapped, "If you want to save the people of this city you'll do as I say. I want all the pressure you've got turned on in that air chamber."

For an instant I suspected where he was going to tell me to go to, but I guess my fanatically sincere appearance must have changed his mind because he

turned to the red head and said, "Turn on the pressure. I'll tell you when to stop."

I felt my knees filling with water and my whole body began to shake like—well any simile I can think of sounds weak so I'll just skip it. I knew that the responsibility for countless lives was on my shoulders but it was too late to turn back now.

I hurried to the window and peered in at Nellie. She was still puffed up to her abnormal state. In fact she looked worse.

The Professor and Ericson were peering over my shoulder. I nudged Ericson and whispered, "More pressure."

Ericson waved his hand behind him and, looking over his shoulder I saw the red head twisting a valve.

I looked back at Nellie but she was still swelled up like a little basketball.

"More pressure," I hissed again to Ericson and he waved his hand again. Sweat was popping out on my forehead and pouring down my cheeks in tiny rivulets.

For a moment nothing changed and then I heard the Professor's voice bubbling with excitement.

"Look, man, look," he almost screamed. "She's shrinking, she's shrinking."

IT was true. Nellie's bloated abdomen was rapidly shrinking and in a few seconds she had regained her sylph-like figure. Amazed, she rolled to her feet and scampered playfully about, obviously delighted with her sudden change.

"It—it—it's not possible," Ericson was stuttering. The pressure in there would crush a man like a cardboard box. Something's wrong."

"There's nothing wrong," I said with a pardonable smugness, "I got it all figured out. The U-235 on Nellie's in-

side is pushing out, and the air pressure on the outside is pushing in—so," I spread out my hands in a gesture of the Professor's, "all that was necessary was to balance the two pressures, make them equalize each other. We've done that and as a result everything's okay. Without the U-235, Nellie would be crushed by the air pressure. Without the air pressure she'd be blown apart by the U-235. Simple isn't it?"

The Professor sagged against the wall, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. "You call it simple," he demanded, "If you're right it's the most brilliant deduction I've ever heard."

"It seems to be working," Ericson said, "but what if the U-235 begins to exert more pressure? What happens then?"

"We increase the air pressure," I answered, "until the increased inside pressure is neutralized."

This science business is a snap if you just use the common sense approach.

"But," Ericson swallowed nervously, "she'll starve in there. How are we going to feed her?"

"We can use an air lock," the Professor answered, "the same type they use on submarines."

Ericson frowned thoughtfully and then his head nodded in agreement. "Yes, we can do that. We've got the material right here. It shouldn't be much of a job." The frown faded on his face and his lips parted in a relieved smile, "Well, sir, it looks like we—" His voice suddenly choked off in a strangled bellow.

"Wait a minute" he roared, "How're we going to move this confounded mouse?" He glared accusingly at the Professor and me as if he expected one of us to whip out the blue prints and specifications for the job. "I've got a schedule to maintain and this chamber is right in the middle of the tunnel.

We've got to go through here. Now what about it?"

The Professor shook his head with finality. "I'm sorry," he said, "but surely you realize we can't move Nellie now."

"Oh my God," Ericson gasped. He sat down suddenly on a pile of rock, his face going white and red by turns. "Do you mean we've got to detour the Chicago subway?" his voice was so thick it almost strangled him, "because, because of a mouse?"

The Professor nodded. "As long as that U-235 is active it would be running a terrible risk to think of moving her. Only when that unit of U-235 has released it's energy will it be safe to move Nellie."

Ericson's head jerked up, hope dawning in his eyes.

"How long will that take?" he asked eagerly. "Maybe I can hold things up for a while."

The Professor counted quickly on his fingers and then closed his eyes. I could see his lips moving rapidly. Finally he opened his eyes and beamed brightly at the haggard figure of the superintendent. "I should say," he said pleasantly, "that a conservative estimate would be about two thousand years."

Ericson tried to say something, but the words choked off in a horrified gurgle.

"So I'm afraid you'll just have to keep increasing the pressure from time to time," Waldo said. He had stepped back in front of the heavy glass observation window again. "Oh my," he bleated. "You'd better put on some more pressure now. I think Nellie is beginning to show signs of swelling once more!"

Then Ericson found his voice. "Good God, man. Don't you realize that we've got all the pressure on now? We can't

possibly make any more!"

I had been standing there, feeling like an eleventh finger or a third eye, when suddenly The Old Light began to burst over me. It was another idea. Screwy maybe—but an idea!

"Wait right here!" I yelled excitedly. "I'll be back. I think I've got it! Wait here!"

I WHIPPED off, leaving Ericson and Waldo standing by the chamber, looking after me as though they suspected I'd gone mad, but hoped I hadn't. In something like four minutes after I'd given the signal at the bottom of the shaft, I was up on terra firma again, jumping off the elevator and dashing toward a taxi parked at a stand near the curb.

The favors I've done for people in this man's town quite often come in handy. This was one of those times.

I gave the cabbie the address I wanted. And flashing my press card in his mug, I told him not to spare the horses. He took me at my word, and we'd no sooner hurtled down Randolph Street—barreling through four red lights—than sweet music came to my ears. The wailing sirens of three motorcycles!

A few quick words, and we had the motorcycle cops as escorts. From now-on-in, the way was going to be plenty clear. Three more blocks, and we drew up in front of the Fire Station. I was out of the cab like a shell from a Bertha, and in three minutes had spilled my story—plus my demands—into the ear of the Chief.

"I can't do it, Hosk," Chief Martin said, "you know I can't!"

"Listen," I answered, pouring on the heat, "get on the telephone, if you have to and get the Marshal's okay. But," and I made my voice imply a lot of things, "get those trucks wheeling, be-

fore I have a surge of memory about a certain arson case!"

Martin turned white, but managed a sickly, eager sort of grin. "Sure, Hosk, anything you say. We won't have to get an okay. Glad to help you!" Then he was off sounding the alarm.

The motors of two huge fire wagons were thrumming into action as I dashed out of the station and back into the cab. Chief Martin was at the door, yelling after me.

"But where to, Hosk?"

I'd almost forgotten that rather important detail. But time being an essence, and not wanting him to get a chance to change his mind, I yelled: "Follow us!"

Then the cab was lurching away to the second address I'd given the driver. The motorcycle cops were still serving escort, and inside of thirty seconds, two fire trucks had careened out of the Station and were whaling along on our tail. The din was terrific.

The good citizens of Chicago, lined along the streets of the Loop as we headed back east, must have thought that a special prevue of Hell was being advertised in advance. Three coppers on bikes, sirens wailing, out in front of a comet-like cab — and the procession being rounded out by two fire wagons clanging and moaning in our wake — must have looked like some fun, definitely!

Four minutes and twelve futile stop lights later, we wheeled up in front of a huge building near Twenty - Second Street and the lake. Once again I popped out of the cab and did a Jessie Owens into the place. The Allied Chemical company is a big joint, so it took me all of three minutes to barge past secretaries and find the boss, one Kendall Leeds.

Leeds was at the window, staring out into the street at the fire trucks in front,

a bewildered expression on his thin pan. He wheeled, as I burst into his office.

"Hosk," he blurted, "what's all this ab—"

I cut him short. Ken Leeds was a wordy devil if he once got started, and this was no time for how-have-you-beens. Talking like a dictaphone that's been greased, I told him what I wanted. There was no need here for blackmail. For I'd gone to school with Ken, and he owed me plenty. Finally, he was shaking his head like a man with a twitch, so I knew it was okay.

"Sure, sure," Leeds was saying bewilderedly. "Sure, sure."

Then I got him to sit down at his telephone, and in another two minutes he had ordered out the necessary trucks. Portable units. Two of them.

Leeds was behind me as I raced out of his office. "I gotta see this thing," he shouted by way of explanation. By the time we had both climbed into the cab, his trucks had pulled up behind the fire buggies, and were ready to go.

"Back to where I found you," I yelled at the cabbie, and he threw the hack into gear, while the motorcops started their bikes again. The Fire Engines were behind us, and behind them were the two Allied Chemical trucks — some procession — and what time!

WE scared hell out of practically ever last motorist on Michigan Boulevard as we screamed back north toward Lake Street, for there was darned little traffic to halt us. All cars were pulling over to the curb, their white-faced drivers piling out to see what was going on.

The Salt Flats Speedway had nothing on old Boul Mich during the five minutes it took us to barrel down on Lake Street. Baby what a ride! Heart-in-the-mouth stuff. Leeds, sitting be-

side me in the cab, didn't even open his mouth. He just stared, while the Chicago skyline blazed past us.

All this time, there had been the desperate hope in my mind that Nellie wasn't ballooning any further; that we'd be able to get back to the subway shaft in time. If that stuff went off—I had to close my eyes and clench my fists at the thought, whoooof!

Tires screaming, we lurched around the corner of Lake and Michigan, and in several split seconds were plowing pell mell under the elevated structures, practically scorching the paint off the steel pillars flicking past us.

Another screeching turn—in which we almost ran down four fear-frozen pedestrians—and we were at the subway shaft. It was with thirty-seven varieties of relief that I saw nothing had happened—yet. For if the U-235 had exploded in our absence, there wouldn't have been any sub—well, there wouldn't have been anything at all!

We piled out.

Chief Martin had his orders. So did Leeds of Allied Chemical. Twenty seconds after we screeched to a halt, they were bawling orders at their crews and I was racing to the elevator shaft.

I knew that if we were too late we'd never know it. Supposing my idea didn't work—I closed my eyes and groaned. It *had* to work, it just *had* to!

Two firemen were unwinding a hose and clamping onto a fire hydrant. Seconds later they were hauling the slack of the hose onto the elevator.

"All set," Chief Martin snapped, following them and climbing over the coiled hose, "We're ready. Where's Leeds and his men?"

I looked anxiously to Leeds' trucks and saw that his crews were unloading bulky apparatus from the rear tail gates.

"They'll be along," I said. I looked

at my watch. I'd been gone twenty-five minutes already. I didn't have much more time. Minutes at the most.

I gripped the descent cable with palms suddenly clammy. Two of Leeds' men moved awkwardly onto the elevator, carrying between them a heavy crated machine. Leeds, himself, pale and nervous followed them. I jerked the cable, and we were descending to the tunnel, to Nellie and—maybe—to our tomb!

When the elevator stopped Leeds and Martin snapped instructions and I raced into the tunnel.

The Professor and Ericson were still peering into the blasting chamber. They both wheeled as I charged into sight.

"She's about ready to go," Ericson shouted, "Where have you been? What are we going to do? We've got—"

HIS voice choked off as he saw the firemen swarming into the passageway behind me. The Professor leaped to my side and grabbed me by the arm.

"My boy," he gasped, "What are you thinking of? You can't be thinking of—"

"I'm not thinking," I snapped, "I'm guessing. If I've guessed wrong—" I left the sentence hanging and turned to Chief Martin. "There's an air lock connecting with this chamber. Tell your men to drag their hose there and I'll help Leeds set up his apparatus."

The Professor was hanging onto my arm. "What are you doing?" he cried frantically, "You can't flood that chamber!"

"Why not?" I asked.

"It won't do any good," he answered. "The pressure of the water will not be sufficient to equalize the U-235."

"Maybe not," I snapped. I waved to Leeds to hurry and then turned back to the Professor. "Water won't stop it,"

I said, "but maybe ice will."

"Ice?" Waldo echoed blankly.

"That's it," I said. "That outfit that Leeds is connecting is a mobile refrigerating unit, capable of freezing water in somewhere near forty or fifty seconds. We're going to flood that chamber and then freeze it solid. It's the only thing I could think of."

"But," the Professor gasped, "That won't—" his voice trailed off weakly, and then suddenly he snapped his fingers.

"Maybe you're right son," he cried, "Tremendous pressure is created by the process of freezing. It might be enough to counteract the U-235!* Well," he demanded suddenly, "What are you standing there for? Let's get to work!"

"You said it," I yelled.

Everybody pitched in. The refrigerating unit was connected and turned on and water was flooded into the excavation chamber.

"We'll have to reinforce the entire chamber," the professor was saying, "steel walls, with layers of concrete to make this chamber absolutely impregnable. Then with a permanent refrigerating unit installed here we can maintain this pressure indefinitely."

"What about Nellie?" I asked.

The Professor smiled sadly. "Nellie

*It is a well-known fact that water expands when it freezes, and many an expensive plumber's bill has been submitted to careless persons who forget their science to the extent of allowing their water pipes to freeze. The force of a few cubic inches of water is sufficient to burst a strong steel pipe. Automobile motor blocks are shattered like glass by a few quarts of water. Therefore, it presents an interesting problem as to the amount of pressure that would be produced by a quantity of water such as this, filling a whole section of the Chicago Subway. Pressure on an ordinary automobile motor block, to burst it, requires several thousand pounds per square inch. It is quite logical to estimate that literally billions of pounds of pressure would be exerted by a large quantity of water such as this.—Ed.

is being sacrificed for the common good. But maybe she will be preserved by the refrigeration process. Eons from now when the U-235 has expended itself she may be able to resume her interrupted existence."

The water was rising to the top of the chamber and the refrigerating unit was functioning smoothly and in ten minutes tiny beads of ice were forming on the outside of the steel partition.

I began to breathe easier, but it wasn't until the entire chamber was frozen solid that I really relaxed. Then I went limp all over. Vaguely I could hear Ericson shouting: "What about my subway? What about my schedule?" but it seemed like such a minor detail that I didn't bother to answer. The Professor beat me to it, anyway.

"We can't disturb this chamber," he said emphatically. "We'll install the necessary apparatus to keep this chamber frozen and it will have to stay that way. I'm sorry about your subway but I'm afraid you'll just have to find another route."

Well they did. The papers announced that the subway was being rerouted because "unfavorable conditions" had been encountered.

Nothing was said about Nellie or her stomach-full of U-235 or the protective armor of ice that encased them both. For the peace and security of the public mind it had been considered advisable to keep these things quiet.

But the city officials know about it. They've appropriated a special fund to take care of the permanent refrigeration unit and they've also commissioned Professor Waldo to maintain the entire set-up.

Naturally care is being exercised.

They're the most important frozen assets the city owns!

The VANISHING



WITNESSES

Time and again important state witnesses vanished into thin air. Then Dick Boyle followed—into a time-crazy dimension...

BY
ROSS
ROCKLYNNE

GONE! Vanished into thin air!" District Attorney Parkins said in utter disgust. "The State's key witness! Without her, we haven't got a case."

Dick Boyle looked at his superior. "That makes five straight missing witnesses. Five straight cases lost . . ."

"Yes," roared Parkins, leaping to his feet, "and by Heaven, it's the last one I'm going to lose. Boyle, we're going to lick this thing, here and now!"

Suddenly, in the flick of an eyelid, Patricia became a blur—was gone!



"Lick it?"

"Sure. Tonight's papers are going to carry headlines. *State Uncovers New Witness, Attorney Parkins Promises Sensational Testimony As New Witness Takes Stand, Claim Mystery Man Knows More Than Missing Witness, Kidnapers Fail This Time!*"

Boyle stared. "Are you crazy? What's the sense of that? You haven't got so much as a character witness. Why make yourself look like a fool. . . .?"

Parkins grinned. "I'm not going to. I won't be any worse off when my *new* witness is kidnaped too . . ."

"Kidnaped?"

"Yes. Boyle, you are going to be that witness! You are going to be kidnaped! And you are going to . . ."

"Wa-a-a-it a minute—whoa!" Boyle halted him. "I'm not sticking my neck in any death trap . . ." He stopped and stared at Parkins peculiarly. Then a wry smile began to twist itself about his lips. "Say, I think you've got something there. It's the only way to solve the mystery of the vanishing witnesses. . . ."

"Exactly. And if I know your record, once you know what's up, you'll do something about it."

"Thanks," said Boyle wryly. "Something tells me my record isn't going to look so good after this job! But this time it's Patricia Velney who's missing, and Pat happens to be the girl I hope to marry some day . . ."

Parkins stared. "I didn't know that."

Boyle's lips tightened. "Well you know now, and you can count on me."

Parkins clapped him on the back. "Good," he said soberly. "The whole force will be right behind you."

IT happened with devastating suddenness!

Dick Boyle was walking carelessly

down the street, at the bottom of the canyon formed by parallel cliffs of skyscrapers, his thoughts occupied mainly with Patricia Velney and her disappearance. He was being purposely careless, of course; that was his role. He did not, however, think that he had dispensed entirely with caution.

He had.

"That's him!" he heard a harsh whisper, and the next thing he knew, a half dozen figures rushed out of the alley, full at him!

He whirled, flailing out with his arms. In the split instant of instinctive action, he realized that this was the moment he had been waiting for. But Lord! How unexpectedly it had come!

Nonetheless, his part was to *fight*. Even though he would most certainly be vanquished. And fight he did.

"That for you!" he gritted, and one of his bearded, purposeful opponents went bowling backwards, with a grunt of pain. The others were undismayed. Boyle felt the impact of a tangle of fists and bodies. He received a crushing blow on the jaw. The world seemed to go black. Yet, even under the shocking pain of that temporary release of life, his lips twisted—in a grin of triumph!

HE CAME TO in a world that seemed sinisterly lacking in the barest suggestion of sound. His eyes snapped open, and his hands crept up to his aching head.

"Whew!" He shook his head groggily, opening and closing his eyes to clear his mind. Then he levered himself to a sitting position, on the edge of a crude bunk. His eyes darted around, canvassed the room. He saw a chair, a washstand, a single door, partly open, a linoleumed floor—and a window, uncurtained, beyond which was what seemed the light of early morning.

Again he allowed the smile of triumph to sweep his tanned, youthful face. District Attorney Parkins had guessed right! He had been attacked, he had been captured!

Now for the job in hand.

He rose slowly, his mind running with curiosity, with an eagerness to solve the disappearance of Patricia Velney.

He walked first to the open window, his brow furrowed with puzzlement. If he were a captive, then he was certainly not being guarded very closely! No bars on the window, nothing, absolutely nothing that might have prevented his escape either from the window or from the door!

If that was a surprise, what he saw now was a greater surprise. He stuck his head out the window. At first glance, he saw a garden, directly below, no more than ten feet. The garden stretched away profusely, in a riot of colors, was brought up short by an ivy covered wall. Beyond the wall was a—highway. No automobiles on it, but it stretched away for miles on either side of him. Far down the road, he thought he caught the barest glimpse of a city—that must be Vivatown. On the horizon, the sun was rising, visibly! He stared a moment in wonder at the sight.

He sucked his breath through his teeth. Where was he? If he was a captive, why weren't there any men about? It would be easy as ABC to simply leave by this window, jump the wall, and go. He laughed to himself. Of course, there was some catch to it.

Yet, suddenly, he did see a figure. But how strange that it should be where it was!

The figure was that of a man, flat on his stomach, creeping forward, inch by inch through a profusion of flowers. Boyle watched sharply, his big, capable hands gripping the edge of the window

sill. He watched while the man approached closer and closer to the wall. There! He had reached it. In a sudden surge of reckless motion, he now sprang to his feet, as Boyle watched, grasped the ivy vines lacing the wall, levered himself up in what was apparently a wild bid for freedom, and then—vanished.

Vanished!

Boyle caught himself quivering, and his lips open in a soundless cry of horror. Good God! The man had been there—Boyle had caught a momentary glimpse of a refined, ascetic face—and then he had disappeared into thin air as if he had never been.

He forced himself back to calmness, drew himself away from the window, two tiny lines of shock and amazement forming between his dark, heavy eyebrows.

"Easy to escape!" He laughed to himself, unsteadily. But what had happened? Did they have some sort of disintegrator ray, his captors? Had they snuffed that man's life out, dematerialize his entire body? There seemed no other explanation! But it was fantastic, too fantastic! Surely there must be some commonplace explanation.

He whirled, an indefinable warning racing in his blood. A scuffling sound had come at the doorway. He strode forward two steps, flung the door all the way open. Something cold chilled his stomach, and the blood raced away from his face.

"You!" he said hoarsely, and he felt the cold, thick sweat suddenly bead on his skin.

"Ah, yes," murmured the small, mustached man who stood there. "It is none other than—me!" There was a whimsical look on his ascetic face. "I am the one you saw in the garden. *Mon dieu!* There is a bit of eeriness to

this strange abode in which we—and now you—find ourselves prisoners.” He chuckled, made a hopeless gesture. “I saw you watching from the window. It is an amusing game. One tries to escape. One almost reaches his goal when—*pouf!*” He made a gesture. “One is no longer escaping. One is back in the house.”

BOYLE forced his nerves to relax. Slowly, while his eyes held the stranger's, he drew out a handkerchief, wiped his forehead. Then he grinned in sheepish relief.

“You had me going for a minute,” he confessed. “Well, you’ve *still* got me going! The only difference is that I thought you were a ghost of yourself; but now I know you’re real. Say, what’s the set-up?”

The Frenchman looked puzzled.

“I mean, are there others—besides us two? And where are we? Where’re the people who are keeping us captive?”

He was getting a better look at the man who stood before him now. A small, thin, indolent sort of man, with a whimsical deviltry in his black eyes, he was dressed in a loose, stained smock—the mark of the scientist, probably chemistry, on him. He sported a mustache which must at one time have been waxed.

The Frenchman smiled a slow, tantalizing smile. “They are around us!” he exclaimed. He pointed to the window. “A few minutes ago, it was night. Now it is the middle of day! *Comprenez vous?*”

Boyle looked out the window, his eyes popping. It was full day! Noon!

“My friend, it is of the simplicity! Yet, come with me and I shall show you the others—a most charming group! And it is well to watch oneself as one walks. There is difficulty in keeping

the balance.”

Frowning, Boyle found this was true as he followed the quickly stepping little man. The simple act of putting one foot before the other was *not* simple. One had a terrific tendency to fall forward, and the extended foot would hit the floor before one was aware of it. Swearing in amazement, Boyle found that the trick was never, for a fractional second, to allow the body to get out of balance. Mysteries were piling up with a vengeance!

The Frenchman led him down a carpeted hall lit now by a single bulb, through a door, and into a room that was several times larger than the one in which Boyle had found himself. There were arm chairs, end tables, magazines. The windows were open. Boyle’s eyes popped. Now it was almost *night* outside!

The people in the room turned interested faces toward him, some rising to their feet. One, a girl with dark hair and pensive brown eyes, remained seated. As his eyes caught hers, the breath was forced from his lungs.

“Tricia!” he exclaimed.

Her eyes widened. “Dick Boyle! Well, of all—”

HE rushed across the room toward her, grasping her hands delightfully, levering her to her feet. He caught her to him in a hug of sheer joy—a hug she did not return. She wrenched away from him.

“What’s the big idea!” she exclaimed, a flush of anger on her cheeks. “Listen, you, I didn’t like you before, and I don’t like you now—even if we are in the same mess. Say, where did you come from, anyhow? The last time I saw you, you were keeping mum on the Antoni case—you wouldn’t even give a hard-working girl reporter a break!” She sneered.

Boyle grinned at her. "Still the same old Tricia! After all, my dear, I was taking orders from the D.A., and I wasn't giving out information for the opposition to use! Besides that, you would probably have gotten the information all garbled anyway! You weren't cut out to be a reporter and you know it. You'd do better cooking meals in a two-by-four kitchen—for a lug named Dick Boyle. Okay, okay, we've gone over that territory before!" He grinned again, this time somewhat wryly, and turned back to the interested group that had formed around him.

Boyle said, "I don't need introductions!" One by one, he pointed them all out, accompanied by their looks of puzzlement.

"Easy," grinned Boyle. "You were all key witnesses in certain court cases. You had your pictures in the newspapers. You—" he pointed to the Frenchman—"your name is Montcliff—Etienne Montcliff, chemist in the employ of the International Chemical Co. Your evidence of the identity of a blood sample would have swung the evidence the right way. As it was, when you disappeared, the murderer went scot free. So with all of you—and with me," he added.

Montcliff saw the note of caution on his face.

He said seriously, quickly, "There is not the need for reticence, *mon ami*. Those who hold us captive can hear no word we say, I assure you!" He studied Boyle shrewdly. "You are a detective, yes? The District Attorney, desiring to get to the bottom of the disappearances of his key witnesses, placed you in the position of a key witness in some important murder case, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Boyle looked around quickly. There were seven men here, five women, most of them within ten or fifteen years of

middle age, one way or the other. All wore faces that showed sincere curiosity and displayed honesty. The exception was a sallow faced little Sicilian, one Tonio Pagli. Boyle remembered that this Pagli had been about to turn state's evidence on the leader of a powerful gang when he had disappeared. Boyle didn't like the sullen, anarchic gleam in his black eyes. Nonetheless, he decided to unburden himself.

He admitted the part he was playing. "As we hoped," Boyle finished wryly, "I was kidnaped. The idea being that I should get into the thick of the plot, discover the leaders of the combine, outwit them, and return the kidnaped persons to their families."

PATRICIA VELNEY said, with faint sarcasm, "Ha! So now you're here, what do you intend to do about it? Mr. Boyle, I compliment you on your sagacity! You've allowed yourself to get captured. But to what end? Don't you think that if it was possible to escape we'd have figured out some way before now?"

Boyle, with deliberate coldness ignored her. He turned to a heavy set, well-fed business man named Haggart.

"As far as you know," he asked respectfully, "how long have you been here?"

Haggart said quickly, "It couldn't have been more than seven or eight days ago—though, as you doubtless know, days and nights pass so quickly—not more than eight or ten minutes each—that there's no way to keep track of time."

Boyle smiled at the group. "I know," he said quietly. "Everything points to it. You say you've been here—according to what your senses tell you—for about a week. Yet, it has been almost a year ago that you, Mr. Haggart, disappeared. I remember the case well.

You were so close to the scene of the Halloway murder that you were in possession of evidence that would undeniably prove John Varney's guilt. Well," he smiled wryly, "Varney was acquitted, and too late to do anything now. What I'd like to know, is why aren't they freeing those of you who can no longer be used as trial witnesses?"

Boyle searched their faces, saw the fear mirrored in half a dozen. He felt a chill course up and down his own back. He hardly dared think the thought that was in his mind.

Montcliff coughed, made a shrugging gesture.

"It is the question we, too, ask," he said, a shadow crossing his thin, ascetic face. "For many of us, the purpose of our captors has been accomplished. We have been held for days of *our* time, for what must be months of *outside* time. Surely we are no longer dangerous!"

They all knew, even as Boyle knew. Some strange metamorphosis had been worked on all of them. Their metabolisms had literally been slowed down! They were actually living, having their being, at a vastly slower rate than their captors. To their captors, they were but infinitely slowly moving statues; while the captors were, in comparison, almost streaks of lightning!

Small wonder then, that escape seemed so utterly, monstrously impossible!

Patricia Velney looked at him curiously. "You're a smart one to figure it out so soon," she said grudgingly. "How come?"

Dick Boyle smiled innocently. "Because even though they did slow down our metabolism, they couldn't slow down gravity! That shows up when we walk."

Obedying a sudden whim, he picked up a cushion from a chair, released it

from his fingers. He never saw it fall, or if he did, it was as a blur. It streaked through the air, and the next thing he knew, it was lying there at his feet.

Montcliff smiled wryly. "It is one of the things that taught us," he admitted. A sudden, whimsical light grew in his eyes. He grasped Boyle's arm, turned to Patricia.

"Come, Miss Velney. We shall play our daily game!" His face lighted with the pleasure of a child.

Patricia shrugged slim shoulders, and moved to his side. Together, moving at a brisk, carefully balanced walk, they moved from the room, down the hall, into the open air. It was morning again, the sun racing with visible speed in the sky.

BOYLE accompanied them, feeling uneasy. He knew what was going to happen. They were walking down a graveled drive, down toward an iron gate.

"It is amazing!" Montcliff was saying. "It will come quickly—*pouf!* We will be back where we started."

Patricia surveyed Boyle with cool eyes.

"You were somewhat of a fool to let yourself get caught in a trap like this," she said contemptuously. "But then, I never did think you were made out to be a flatfoot."

His eyes suddenly blazed. "You certainly go out of your way to antagonize me," he snapped. "If you're still boiling because I'm not in the habit of blabbing off the mouth to every stray sob-sister that comes to me for a story, then you sure do hold grudges a long time."

"I'm not a sob-sister," she flared.

"And I'm not a flatfoot! And besides—" in spite of himself his anger melted—"the real reason I let myself get into this is because I knew that I'd

probably find you. Chew that over, and—”

The words were chopped off in the middle. Dick Boyle hardly knew what happened. There was an amazing, outrageous sense of motion, a conglomerate whirl in front of his eyes, then—he was back in the lounge! And Patricia and Montcliff were there too, looking entirely unconcerned. Even the others did not look surprised. Some merely smiled at his evidently dazed look.

“So that’s the way it is!” he burst out. “That’s the reason you seemed to vanish, Montcliff. One of our captors simply walked up to you where you stood like a statue, and trudged back into the house with you. It was probably a couple minutes to him, only a second or less to you. Good Lord!”

He stood looking at them in amazement.

Tonio Pagli, the Sicilian, shrugged his narrow shoulders.

“Nothin’ new to us,” he said disinterestedly. “We do it for fun.”

Boyle frowned. “That makes it bad. I don’t see how we can escape under conditions like those.”

“That’s right,” Pagli said sarcastically. “None of us see how we can escape. And not only that, if I know that mob, we never will. When they make up their minds to it, they’ll rub us out. I wouldn’t be surprised to get a bullet in my guts any moment.”

Boyle looked at Montcliff helplessly. The Frenchman looked back, his sensitive face screwed up in a perplexed frown.

SILENCE held. In the face of this really incredible dilemma no one could offer a suggestion, even though each realized that he might be in ghastly proximity to death!

Boyle caught Patricia Velney’s eyes. She shook her head slowly, her eyes

filled with pain.

Under some impulse, she moved close to Boyle. She said nothing, though her lips opened once. Then her eyes fell. Even under the tightness of his thoughts, Boyle felt the faint thrill of her nearness, felt that she was trying to convey to him, perhaps, her regret at having acted the way she did. He smiled at her. He suddenly felt, as he never had before, back in the real world of normal people, where flippancies easily rolled off the tongue, that she was precious to him. Strange that the full force of his feeling for her should strike him at that moment. For then—
—then she was *gone!*

Nothing but empty space where she had been!

He choked first. Then, “Tricia!” he screamed hoarsely.

He whirled, a feeling of madness gripping at his mind. She was nowhere!

“Good God!” he burst out. He clapped his hand to his forehead, reeling. Suddenly, Montcliff grasped his arm in a grip of steel.

“Steady now!” he said, his voice grating on Boyle’s consciousness. Boyle pulled himself out of it, shook his head. He stared slowly around, surveying the little, frightened group, his eyes narrowing to slits.

“We’re getting out of here,” he said ominously. “And I don’t mean maybe! That’s the reason I’m here. That’s my job, as a detective. We’re getting *out!*”

Montcliff said, his thin face gravely serious and pitying, “Is it that you know the method, then?” His voice was gentle.

Boyle’s face turned suddenly haggard. He turned away with a groan!

He stood at the window, his big hands grasping the sill feverishly, brushing away the curtains, which, under the impulse of spasmodic breezes were whip-

ping back and forth so swiftly in natural time that they appeared to be made of a frothy gauze to Boyle's eyes. Although it was night again, the moon riding swiftly, in a few minutes more the sun would rise. The stars were wheeling speedily in the sky. His mind turned over and over in desperate effort. He looked blankly out the window until his eyes rested on the wall, perhaps seventy-five feet distant. There was a peculiar little cone-like object with a spray mouth projecting up from the wall directly opposite the window.

"What's that?" he asked.

Montcliff laughed bitterly. "That is the cause of our condition. I am sure it radiates the queer force that slows down our metabolism so that we cannot escape this awful house and garden."

Boyle stared at the cone. "If we could smash that . . ."

"Smash it?" Montcliff snorted. "Don't you think I've tried? But I can't get within ten feet of it. When I start that way, I find myself whisked back into the house. They don't let you even get close to it."

Suddenly a voice spoke behind them.

"Howdy, folks."

BOYLE whirled. A plump little man, unshaved, bleary eyed, stood there, surveying them good-humoredly.

"Huh," he answered their momentary surprise, bleary eyes twinkling. "So now I'm one of the mob, too. Pleased to meetcha, folks. Name's Harrigan. They've given me the double-x, y'see, so they've thrown me in with the rest of the cattle. Ready for the slaughter, y'know." Beneath the twinkle in his eyes, there was hard desperate gleam, that he was succeeding remarkably in overshadowing.

"Ready for the slaughter," Boyle repeated slowly. The others were gathering around, that ominous phrase ring-

ing in their ears, too.

"Sure," said Harrigan, the hard look coming out into the open. "There's been a change of policy. The big shot cleaned enough dough from the dozen of you to start operations in another state. He was thinkin' of lettin' youse people go—but, as I say, they's been a change of policy. It's a job of murder now; all because of that damned girl."

When they just stared at him, he painfully tried to make it clear. "You know—slaughter, assassination, black-out."

Boyle took one grim step toward him, his rocky jaw hard. He grasped the fat little man around the shoulders.

"Talk," he said harshly. "What are you trying to say? Never mind the murder part—what's that about Patricia?"

"Just this," Harrigan snarled. "That blasted girl has double-crossed the lot of you. She played up to the boss, and when I objected to rubbing you all out in cold blood—I ain't no murderer, see?—she gimme the double-x too. She had me sent in here with you, that's what she did!"

"You lie!" shouted Boyle, slapping the fat man in the face.

Harrigan reeled back, his face white with rage. Then he recovered. "I'm not lying, bucko," he said with deadly calm. "And I'll let that slap pass, because I know how you feel. But you'd better take it straight from the shoulder; Patricia Velney ain't your moll any more—she's gone soft on the Boss. She knows what side her butter's on!"

For a moment Boyle stared, then he groaned and his shoulders sagged.

There were a half dozen murmurs from behind Boyle, a hysterical sob from one of the women. Boyle whirled suddenly, and the sheer look of command in his eyes was enough to still them.

"Okay," he said grimly, eyes hard, cold. "I'm handling this from now on. We haven't lost yet, and if I know anything about it, we aren't going to! All right, Harrigan, spill everything! Who's behind this combine?"

From Harrigan he learned enough to make him whistle. Harrigan named a half dozen men who controlled the combine. And all men, as far as Boyle knew, who had had criminal records before. The master mind apparently was Arno Vachel, a physicist who had been disbarred from one of the big universities. It was he who had discovered the metabolism-slowng radiation,* and its accompanying maintaining radiation. Each of those now here had been placed in a chamber in the basement of this house, had been bathed with the radiations; another radiation, emanating from the cone on the wall surrounding this house, maintained the condition. If one were not subjected to the primary radiation, the secondary radiation had no effect. In other words, although the men who held the prisoners in this strange captivity were bathed in the maintaining radiation, they would suffer no effects whatsoever, would live at the normal rate.

"Then," said Boyle, the urgency of action strong on him, "if we can destroy the projector on the wall that keeps us in the condition, we've got 'em licked!"

Harrigan said, returning to his half humorous expression, "You don't do

it that easy. Maybe not at all. I'll tell youse one thing, though. I got a gun."

BOYLE exploded. "A gun!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Give it to me! Good Lord, this is a break!"

Harrigan stepped back, however, looking the suddenly hopeful faces over.

"Nope," he said, sticking his hands into his trouser pocket. "Looky here, folks. I was one of the fellows that used to pick you up like statues and walk back to the house with you when you strayed too far. It would take maybe two hours for youse people to walk as far as the wall. Then I'd go out and pick you up—just amblin' along sorta, takin' my time. See?" His face turned mournful. "Well, it's just the same way. It would take a whole five minutes fer me to get this gun out from outa my armpit. It would be like slow motion. One of *them*—" he made an expression of hate "—one of them would see me pullin' out the gun, and that'd be the end of that!"

Boyle grimaced. "That's right." He frowned and thought deeply. The others stirred restlessly.

"It's hopeless," said Montcliff in a desolate voice

But Boyle paid no attention. "Maybe . . ." he muttered, almost to himself.

He suddenly whirled. "Harrigan!"

Harrigan came across toward him, puzzled.

Boyle nodded briefly at the cone on the wall.

"How good a shot are you?" he demanded. "And if that cone was wrecked, would it destroy the radiation?"

Harrigan answered the first with a sly grin and "Hell, I can knock a gnat's shadow from underneath him." To the second question he was dubious.

*Body metabolism has much to do with our time-sense, or our conception of the passage of time. And the metabolism-slowng ray of Dr. Vachel no doubt utilizes this apparent connection. Time is a relative thing, and perhaps its normal rate of passage is not normal at all, but simply a manifestation of our own physical reaction to it. Thus, the metabolism ray might be called, with more accuracy, a time-ray. At least, no scientific argument can exist against the paradox of time, when it obviously depends on so variant a yardstick as physical energy expenditure.—Ed.

He was pretty sure that if you wrecked the cone it would put the ray out of commission, but he wasn't certain.

"Anyway," he said plaintively, "how will I draw the gat without *them* seein' me?"

"We'll come to that," Boyle said, a reckless gleam in his eye. His voice dropped lower. He asked Harrigan other questions. The net of this was that once the maintaining radiation was no longer in existence, normal time would come to the captives over a period of less than thirty seconds. Boyle's eyes flashed.

"Here's what I want you to do," he said, still keeping his voice low, so the others couldn't hear. "Pick a fight with Pagli!"

"Pick a fight with Pagli?"

"Sure! Insult him. Say something that will make him hopping mad. Hit him. Let him hit you! Make it spectacular. Lord knows that even now they must be planning to kill us—but if they see a slow-motion fight going on, they may be interested enough to wait a while and enjoy the scene. Understand? And then—" his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper "—and then—draw your gun, with the *apparent* intention of plugging Pagli! Get it?"

HARRIGAN'S eyes widened. His fleshy lips protruded in a slow soundless whistle. But his face paled. "That sure is a long shot!" he said uncertainly.

Boyle snapped, "Nothing's a long shot, when they might spray us with bullets in the next few minutes."

Harrigan unhappily nodded his head. He turned away from the window.

Montcliff and the others were puzzled when they faced the group again.

"Is it that you have the method after all?" queried Montcliff, looking uncertainly from Harrigan to Boyle.

Boyle said nothing. But Harrigan suddenly snarled, out of thin air,

"Naw! There ain't no way outa this mess. I been double-x'd, I have." His eyes rested with apparent accident on Pagli, the sallow little Sicilian. A sneer crossed his fleshy face. "Double-x'rs and stool-pigeons is people I particularly don't like, and I don't care who knows it!"

Tonio Pagli's expression underwent a series of changes; from puzzlement to incredulity to tight-lipped rage.

"What you makin' reference to?" he snarled.

Harrigan didn't waste words or time. He walked up to Pagli.

"I'm makin' reference to *you*, you dirty stool-pigeon! You was goin' to turn state's evidence on Joe Bronhof, wasn't you? Yah, I hate your guts!"

He lashed out with one stinging palm. It caught Pagli alongside the face. Pagli jumped back, his black eyes crawling with incredulous fury. He suddenly reached into his pocket. As if by sleight-of-hand, a long, wicked knife appeared in his hand. He drew it back over his shoulder.

"Look out!" one of the women screamed.

Pagli, however, had released the knife by that time, throwing it with full force. Pagli, however, did not realize the vagaries of a slow existence. It had taken him perhaps one minute to whip the knife from his hand. Consequently the knife *fell* from his hand in an invisible arc, and struck the floor.

Harrigan, grinning, closed in on him again, struck out with a hammy fist. Pagli went bowling backward, regained his balance, and choking out inarticulate animal cries flung himself at Harrigan. For a full minute—what must have been almost an hour in the outside world—they tangled, Pagli getting the worst of it. But Pagli was game.

He kept wading in for more, berserk with white rage. His persistence had its reward. His smaller fist came up, smacked against Harrigan's jaw. Harrigan staggered backward, not from the force of the blow, which was difficult, in this world where momentum was hard to acquire, but from the fact that he had been thrown off balance. He snarled. His hand darted under his ill-fitting coat.

Boyle, watching, clenched his fists, a pulsation of agony in his mind. If Harrigan should fail, now! But the build-up had been perfect. Were the men who were guarding them watching, in enjoyment? When Harrigan brought the gun into plain sight, would it be whisked away? Everything depended on what Harrigan was doing now!

HARRIGAN played his part well.

"Here's where you get yours, stool-pigeon!" he snarled.

And the gun, a squat, high-powered automatic, came into full view!

Boyle watched it. Incredible to think that the guards *must* be watching that same gun, must be pulled with uncertainty, as to whether they should snatch it away, or let Harrigan use it on Pagli, who, along with all the others, was slated to die anyway. What would they do?

The answer came so quickly that it was breathtaking.

There was no sound of a shot; sounds of the outside normal world were not attuned to the ears of these who were trapped in slow time. But smoke billowed out from the gun barrel dispersed in the space of an eye wink. Pagli was caught motionless, in that tableau, as he realized the gun had spoken. Montcliff had given rise to a hoarse cry, and started forward. The other ten fell back, away from Harrigan. None realized that Harrigan had aimed through

the window at the cone on the wall outside.

Then, Harrigan's reedy, yet powerful voice was blasting exultantly.

"*Got it!* Square in the middle! Let's go, gang!"

Boyle tensed himself. He felt no sensation of any kind, yet he knew that the transformation was taking place. That battle had taken place over the space of a single minute of unreal time — probably an hour to those watching; if, indeed, they had been watching? He knew the cone had been wrecked!

Sounds began to pluck at Boyle. The low, rising pitch of a train whistle in the distance. The rumble of cars on the highway outside. The murmur of men's voices. The chirp of insects. The sigh of a wind.

All grew in a rush and a roar of sound. The real time was coming back! The maintaining radiation had disappeared!

And out of the invisibility into which their incredibly fast, yet normal, motion had placed them, three men were becoming visible!

Boyle caught one glimpse of startled expressions, of unshaved; brute faces—of guns suddenly drawn as their captors came to realize what was happening. Complete surprise to them, utter shock, this sudden return of their captives to normalcy. Then, cold fiendishly swift resolve. Their guns came up!

BOYLE saw that, as did Montcliff and Harrigan. As if possessed with one mind, they threw themselves forward. Boyle loosed a shout from his throat that was as fearsome as that of an enraged leopard. Then his sweeping hand impacted against the gun hand of one of the gangsters. The gun spoke, and the echoes rolled away. Behind Boyle, there was a scream of agony; but he didn't have time to find out who

had been shot. With savagely compressed lips, he tangled with the gangster.

"Take that!" His bunched fist swept up. There was a sickening crack. The gangster slumped, reeled, fell. Boyle swooped up his automatic, fell back one step, his lips stretched tight over his teeth in a savage grimace. The gun spoke again, shatteringly in this enclosed room. Montcliff pushed his opponent away, grinning delightedly.

"*Bien!*"

The second gangster was obviously dead. The third, however, leaped back, a snarl contorting his vulpine features. His gun spoke once, twice, before Boyle shot the deadly, spouting thing out of his hand, then leaped in and finished him with one smashing blow.

Boyle whirled, stooped over Harrigan. Harrigan was on the floor, his face pale as death. His bleary eyes rolled up to meet Boyle's.

"This is the finish—for me!" he gasped. "Did we give 'em—hell!" His head lolled. Boyle dropped him, the hot sting of tears in his eyes. He leaped to his feet, took swift stock of the situation. Pagli was down, nursing his thigh, a sick, dull look on his sallow face. The others were standing still in shock. All this had taken no more than a minute. Yet, even that was long enough for the blasting guns to have sounded the warning to whoever else was in the house!

Boyle snapped, "Montcliff! You other men! Follow me. The women will remain here. Take care of Pagli, rip down the curtains and tie those gangsters up—tight! All right. Come on!"

He loped out the door, automatic drawn to the ready. Montcliff fell in beside him. Behind them, the other men came, eager to do their bit.

Out in the corridor, they suddenly

heard pounding feet, coming toward them. Suddenly a half dozen men shot into view, running toward the scene of the disturbance.

Boyle wasted no time in preliminaries. Savagely, he pumped lead full into them. Montcliff followed his example. Three of the men fell, the rest gave vent to shouts of fear, and turned tail.

"After 'em!" Boyle shouted, exultation ringing in his voice.

They clattered up a flight of stairs, in full chase. Boyle's gun smashed out once again, and one of the pursued came tumbling down the stairs with a fearful racket. The others suddenly turned with brute snarls, started firing into the close packed pursuers. Boyle uttered a groan, collapsed to one knee as a slug bit deep into the fleshy part of his right leg. But the automatic in his hand jerked again. Another one down!

"Go on!" he raged to Montcliff. "Up the stairs! I can't make it!"

"*Oui!*" Montcliff gasped. He was about to work his way around Boyle, when from the top of the stairs, where the two remaining gangsters had their pursuers at such a merciless disadvantage, a harsh, guttural voice sounded with the ring of authority. The two gangsters abruptly fell back. In their stead appeared a white-haired man clad in flowing smock. His face, beyond question one of the most intelligent that Boyle had ever seen, was contorted with anger.

In his hand was a sub-machine gun.

MONTCLIFF halted as if he had been struck, his breath sucking between his teeth. "*Mon Dieu!*" he whispered hoarsely.

The white-haired man smiled a terrible smile.

"Fools," he said, his lips stretching

back over large, widely-spaced teeth. He stood there, holding them at bay, his terrible eyes roving over them, counting them approvingly.

"All right, Vachel." Boyle spoke coolly, though his eyes were narrowed to slits of apprehension. "Give yourself up. We're on to you and your little scheme. Throw down that gun, and I promise you at least that you won't receive the death penalty!"

John Vachel, who, because of unethical experiments on his students, had been disbarred from a prominent university, smiled again.

Behind Vachel appeared the figure of Patricia Velney. She spoke.

"Wait, darling," she called. "Let me see the fun too. I'd like to look the poor fools over before we finish this job."

"Pat!" exclaimed Boyle, his eyes wide in shock and horror. Even now, after the dead Harrigan's revelation, he had been clinging to the thought that Patricia Velney couldn't be a traitor. But here he saw and heard for himself.

"You . . .!" he mouthed bitterly, then. "What a fool I've been. To think that I fell in love with a woman as low as you! Well, maybe you win this time, but there's a day that'll come for your filthy kind . . ."

Patricia Velney's beautiful face went white. Then she laughed harshly, nudged close to the man with the machine gun. Clinging to his arm, she laughed in Boyle's face.

"Why you dirty little newsboy," she said. "Did you really think I could even look at you with interest? I'm heading for big things, I am. I've found a real man at last—" she gazed fondly up at the brutal face of the man, Vachel, who grinned down at her. "—haven't I, Arno, dear?"

Then the world went red for Boyle, and in spite of the excruciating pain in his leg, he leaped forward savagely.

Vachel's head jerked, started to turn from Patricia. An expression of startlement swept his features. And then, somehow, he was toppling. He fought wildly for balance, shouted in bafflement. He plummeted head first, down the stairs, straight into Boyle.

Boyle tangled with him, was conscious of his voice shouting, "Montcliff! Get the others!"

Bedlam! A gun spoke. Boyle was rolling down and down the stairs, his hard fingers around Vachel's throat. Vachel was clawing at him with both hands, and screaming in fury at the same time. Boyle maintained his desperate grip, conscious of a multitude of feet around him. They suddenly struck the floor. Boyle felt a world-crushing blow, and the world seemed to go black.

Yet, even through this, he madly strove to pin his opponent down. He rolled over, still hanging onto Vachel's throat like death itself. Suddenly the man's struggles ceased. Boyle was on top of him, and madly continued to choke, until the shrieking pain in his head and leg caused him to slump over Vachel's body, hardly aware of what was going on.

Yet, he heard plummeting feet in the hall upstairs, an automatic spitting twice. Then Montcliff's voice, spouting gleeful French. The next thing he knew, there was a light trip of feet coming down the stairs, a sob. He rolled over, too weak to rise. Patricia Velney dropped to her knees beside him, her lovely face strained and tearful.

"Tricia," he said dazedly.

"Dick," she said unsteadily. Without preliminaries, she pressed a frantic kiss to his lips. She peered into his eyes. "I thought you were dead," she blurted.

HE struggled up on one elbow. She snuggled his head in her lap.

(Concluded on page 143)

PANTASTIC



PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM

HISTORY'S GREATEST SHOWMAN and PERPETRATOR OF HOAXES BECAME SUCCESSFUL IN HIS EARLY TWENTIES THROUGH HIS YANKEE TRAIT OF CREDIBLE SHOWMANSHIP COUPLED WITH FALSE-SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE . . .



HIS FAVORITE EPIGRAM



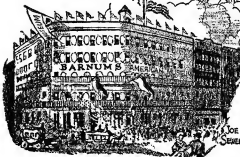
The "FEJEE" MERMAID

WAS A STRANGE, SHRIVELED THING WITH MONKEY'S HEAD AND ARMS AND A FISH-TAIL. THE BODY WAS COVERED WITH HAIR UNDER WHICH SCALES WERE VISIBLE .



ZIP- the WHAT-IS-IT.

BARNUM CLAIMED TO HAVE PURCHASED ZIP FROM A SAILOR. AFTER HIS DEATH HE WAS PROVED TO BE A DEFORMED NEGRO WITH A PRIMITIVE SKULL CLAD IN A TIGHT FITTING SUIT OF FUR . . .



1841 BARNUM TOOK OVER THE AMERICAN MUSEUM TO EXHIBIT HIS HOAXES.

WITHIN A YEAR HE MADE BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM NEW YORK'S MOST POPULAR PLACE OF AMUSEMENT,

hoaxes

By Julius Schwartz

PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM, history's greatest showman and one of the quaintest and most engaging liars who ever fooled a trusting public, dedicated his long and brilliant life to proving his favorite epigram:

"There's a sucker born every minute."

His shows ranged all the way from simple freak exhibitions to elaborate theatricals and the concert tour of Jenny Lind; and his undeniable scientific knowledge and ingenuity impelled him to offer a number of frauds that drove both scholars and laymen into baffled argument.

At least two of these—Barnum's "Feejee Mermaid" and "Zip, the What-Is-It"—deserve inclusion in this gallery of hoaxes.

P. T. Barnum, bred in the shrewd Yankee tradition of Connecticut, became a showman while he was still in his twenties. In 1835 he exhibited a venerable Negro slave woman, who looked every day of the 161 years he claimed for her. A yellowed bill of sale was shown to prove that she had once been the nurse of George Washington.

Barnum took in enough admission fees to start a larger show. In 1841, he took over the American Museum in New York. A year later, he was exhibiting the much-discussed mermaid.

It was a strange shriveled thing, this deceased mermaid, with a monkey's head, and arms above and a fish-tail below. A naturalist examined it and could find no evidence of juncture or other artificial combining of two animals.

"But I don't believe in mermaids," the naturalist insisted.

Barnum made the weird mummy the feature of his show, advertised it extensively, and for more telling effect flanked it with such bona-fide anomalies of nature as the Duckbill Platypus and the flying fish.

A bogus "doctor" lectured, telling an extravagant tale of how the creature was netted off the Fiji coast. His speech, written by Barnum, was full of garbled scientific terms; but in one or two places it sounds like the then unpublished theories of Darwin concerning adaptation. When a world traveler protested that he had never heard of a mermaid in Fiji, Barnum neatly retorted that there was no accounting for ignorance.

Barnum was vague about the origin of his phenomenal discovery, but it seems fairly certain that a clever Japanese fisherman had made it with his own two hands, early in the nineteenth century. The fake monkey-fish deceived even the wide-awake countrymen of its maker, who bought

pictures of it for luck.

Later it was sold to Dutch traders on the island of Batavia, thence drifted to India, where it was bought by a Yankee sea-captain. During four weeks that it was shown in New York, Barnum's museum more than doubled its receipts, and it was fully as successful when sent on tour.

Very cleverly put together, under close examination the "mermaid" proved a resounding dud. There was no actual junction between its monkey head and its fishlike body. For another thing, although animal hair "grew" out of the shoulders, a microscope revealed fish scales beneath the hair.

The face was a horrid caricature, a sure-fire baby scarer; the monstrosity was only three feet in length, dessicated, blackish. Distorted were hands on grotesquely misshapen arms; w'ue the mouth, to say the least, was a humdinger.

Wide open, it revealed rows of leering teeth; and the weird aspect of the face was if anything enhanced by the expression on the "features," which seemed to indicate that the incredible thing had breathed its last in considerable pain.

More recent, and probably remembered by many readers, was Barnum's so-called Man-Monkey, or "Zip, the What-Is-It." The showman said that he had bought Zip from a foreign sailor, who could not tell the monster's species or origin. As exhibited in Barnum's museum, and later with his circus, Zip appeared in a cage as a grotesquely manlike figure covered with thick, coarse hair, the skull and face apish. He stood erect and muttered human words.

In 1860, he had the distinction of performing before the then Prince of Wales, and he lived to a ripe old age. For more than a half a century Barnum and his successors foisted Zip upon the public, and sometimes on scientists, as a true "Missing Link," a survival of the prehistoric ape-man.

But when Zip died 15 years ago, he was given a conventional human funeral. Lying in his coffin, he proved to be a deformed Negro with a primitive type of skull. The rest had been a tight-fitting suit of fur and theatrical makeup.

Barnum's scientific deceptions, like most of his exhibits, were not in themselves intricate or even graceful. But his Yankee trait of plausible showmanship, his glib use of pseudo-scientific language, his crafty playing of rival scholars against each other for the sake of publicity, made both the exhibits and himself interesting and baffling throughout the civilized world.

The Golden Amazon

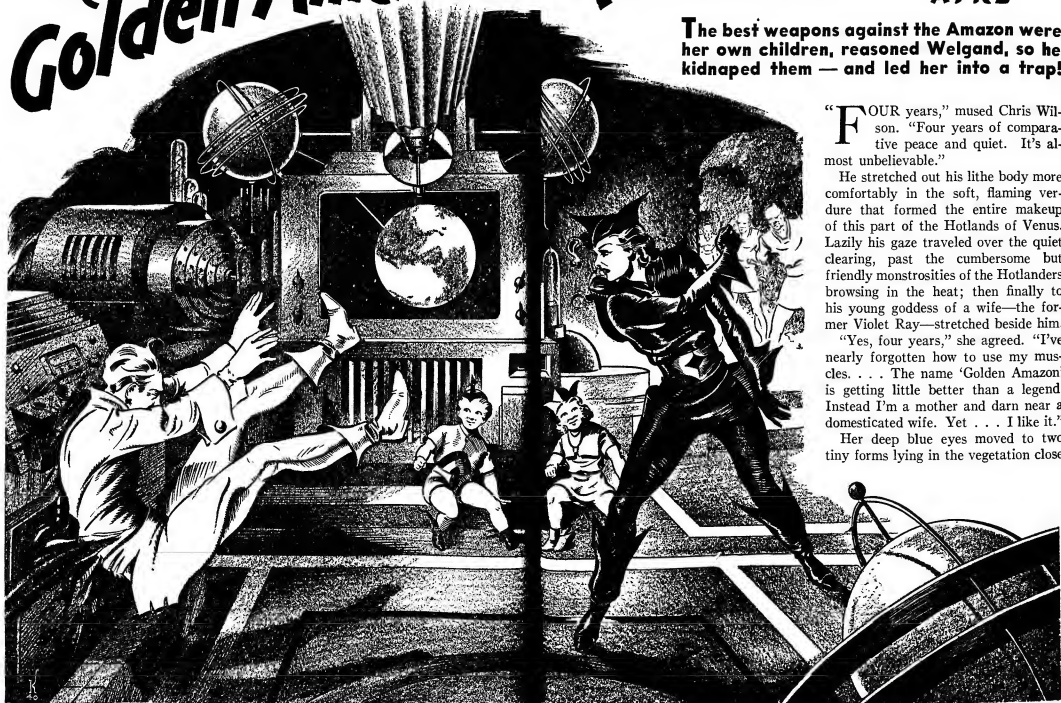


The Amazon's fist lashed out and Welgand crashed against the control board

The Golden Amazon Returns

BY
THORNTON
AYRE

The best weapons against the Amazon were her own children, reasoned Welgand, so he kidnaped them — and led her into a trap!



"FOUR years," mused Chris Wilson. "Four years of comparative peace and quiet. It's almost unbelievable."

He stretched out his lithe body more comfortably in the soft, flaming verdure that formed the entire makeup of this part of the Hotlands of Venus. Lazily his gaze traveled over the quiet clearing, past the cumbersome but friendly monstrosities of the Hotlanders browsing in the heat; then finally to his young goddess of a wife—the former Violet Ray—stretched beside him.

"Yes, four years," she agreed. "I've nearly forgotten how to use my muscles. . . . The name 'Golden Amazon' is getting little better than a legend. Instead I'm a mother and darn near a domesticated wife. Yet . . . I like it."

Her deep blue eyes moved to two tiny forms lying in the vegetation close

Returns

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Her deep blue eyes moved to two tiny forms lying in the vegetation close



by—a boy and a girl, twins, every part of their exposed skin as golden yellow as their mother's.

"Some day," she went on slowly, "those two children of ours are going to grow up, Chris—form the nucleus of a new species. Twenty-five years ago an accident dropped me on this planet and made me a superwoman. That strength, that inborn knowledge of the Venusian jungle and the wilds of space, has been handed on to them. My strength; your civilized culture—Grand combination!"

"Hercules and Hygeia," Chris reflected. "God of strength and goddess of health— Yep, we chose good names for them—but I still like 'The Heavenly Twins' better. . . ."

Vi relaxed again, pondered. "Wonder what ever became of Welgand?" she muttered. "Remember how we got all that gang of crooks, but he just faded away into space? And been gone these four years— Not like him to do that. Of course he's all washed up so far as establishing a criminal domination of Earth is concerned, but it's surprising he's made no effort to get at you and me. Seems logical he would want to break us since we broke him." *

"Let him try!" Chris said grimly; then he shrugged. "Oh be damned to him! We've made our home here; we're happy and comfortable. Why should we bother about—?"

He broke off and sat up suddenly, frowning, as an unaccustomed sound broke the sweltering silences of the jungle. It was the recognizable throb of a space ship's underjets.

"That's odd!" he ejaculated. "Who'd want to come over these Hotlands anyway?"

Vi jumped to her feet, hand shading her eyes. The Hotlanders were now

starting to shift about uneasily, moving into the shelter of the jungle as though in anticipation of some danger.

"Something wrong here," the girl said briefly. "The Hotlanders can sense it quicker than we can— Yes, look!" she finished with a cry; and at that identical moment a small but powerful spaceship, its underjets now cut off, came gliding into view at low altitude over the drooping verdure of the trees. It moved unerringly towards the little clearing.

ABRUPTLY Chris was alive to the danger. He saw a lens uncover in the base of the ship and at the same instant a blue beam cut through the hot and dusty air. It blasted a cindery scorching trail straight along to where the girl stood. Paralyzed with amazement she stared at it; then with a mighty leap Chris dived, shoved her, sent both of them staggering into the undergrowth.

"What goes on?" Vi panted, wheeling round. "Who is it anyway? Unless it's—"

She broke off, watching tensely as the little ship circled abruptly, swept back again with raygun blazing dangerously. Then from the vessel's side there suddenly dropped a life-anchor.* Down it fell, stopped within inches of the two sleeping infants in the vegetation. Just as quickly it recoiled, swept the two into the air, and they vanished in the open lock. Then with a burst of aggressive fire the ship nosed upward, headed voidward with ever increasing speed.

For a full five seconds Vi was too stunned to speak. Then Chris mumbled dazedly, "A snatch! They stole the kids and—"

* "The Amazon Fights Again"—*Fantastic Adventures*, June 1940.

* Life anchor—so called because it attracts living tissue as an ordinary magnet attracts steel.—Ed.

"Welgand!" Vi clenched her fists. "Just as we were talking about him, too. Somehow he got to know of our hideout and— Come on!"

Chris followed her hurriedly across the clearing, into the jungle where their spaceship *Ultra* lay parked.

"Say, we don't know where he's heading," Chris pointed out.

"We'll find out!" Vi retorted. "Space is a big place, and if you think I'm lying around while he steals my babies you're mistaken. Get in!"

"But wait a minute, Vi! That was an obvious snatch. It may have been a trick to—"

The girl listened to no more. With one thrust of her whipcord arm she bundled Chris through the airlock, slammed it shut, then hurried across to the control board.

"Trouble with you, Chris . . ." she maneuvered the superfast little machine over the treetops into the densely misted sky, "is that you talk first and act afterward. That isn't jungle law. If that is Welgand"—her jaws tightened—"I'll finish the job I once nearly accomplished! And if he harms either of our babies God help him!"

Chris nodded grimly; he knew she meant it. Then he looked out of the port. In a few minutes he picked up the distant fast traveling space machine which had made the lightning abduction.

"Don't recognize it as an ordinary vessel," he commented. "No planetary insignia or anything— Of course a wanted criminal would hardly use a ship anybody could recognize—"

"Hardly!" Vi stared through her own window. "So he's heading Moonward. Wonder what he wants there?"

With that she slammed on the power to maximum, lay back with straining muscles as the frightful acceleration all but crushed the breath out of her.

Chris sat down with a thud, gulping for breath. These dizzying dives through space, painful even for the superhuman girl, always left him shaken and sweating.

"Sorry—got to do it," she said curtly. "This is business—grim business. Lie down while we go to it . . ."

Chris obeyed weakly, and from then on the girl kept the ship on full power except for intervals when sheer physical anguish and the need for food demanded a relinquishment. Even so, the distant space machine managed to keep its flying start.

And to Vi's mounting fury the distance did not lessen between them.

THROUGH the hours — grinding hours; through Earth days—and still the bridge was not closed. Evidently the abductor was using a highly volatile mixture in his rocket chambers.

It became clear though as the time passed that the goal was the moon. Its Earth-illuminated mass—for it was almost at new Moon—became larger and larger, until at last the little ship was a silvery speck in the sunshine silhouetted against the copper bowl of the Moon.

"Vi, I still think there is more behind this than a plain snatch," Chris insisted, watching intently through the glass. "If you weren't so volcanic in your methods we'd have time to reason it out—"

"Yeah, and he'd have time to kill my babies! Welgand wouldn't stop at that, don't you forget it!" Vi stopped, her eyes narrowed as she peered ahead. Sunshine had left the distant ship now but it was still just possible to follow its movements. "Tycho crater, eh? That's where he's making for. Better get the spacesuits ready."

Chris did so and she still watched intently. Finally she looked through the telescopic mirror and saw the ship

land on the wide, sprawling crater of Tycho. Dimly she could see the mystic streaks and rays from the crater in the Earthshine. It made it difficult to see what happened to the ship—but apparently it vanished at last in a crack.

Vi straightened up from the mirror, face grim.

"He's gone inside the Moon," she said. "Take over while I get a suit on."

Chris nodded; then when she was ready, barring helmet, he did likewise. With practised hands the girl brought the little ship down into the inky shadows of the range round the vast Tycho crater, closed the anchor switches, then screwed on her helmet and snapped on the intercommunication.

"Whatever happens, we stick together," she announced. "It may be a trick, even as you figured, but either way we'll beat it. Come on."

She slapped a raygun belt around her waist then opened the airlock. She paused, surprised. Chris too halted. Now they came to look at Tycho's floor at close quarters, most of it quite clear in the Earthshine, they saw there was something queer about it. It radiated streaks and rays as usual in hazy pearl-like luster, only it was *not* a rocky arid plain. . . .

"Say, this is—glass!" Vi murmured. "Or something very like it!"

She was right. The fact became clearer as they advanced out onto it. It stretched perhaps a mile in diameter and then merged into the rocky foothills of the spiked mountains surrounding the crater.

"Not glass, but a mineral of some kind," the girl said, her face perplexed inside her helmet. "Wonder what—? Oh, be hanged! We've a job to do. We've got to find that crack— Over there, I think."

They started on a hurried, earnest search. It ended at last in a distinctly

visible cleft leading downwards in the foothills.

"Yes, this must be it," Chris decided, gazing down. "A spaceship could get down if skillfully driven. We go below?"

Vi didn't trouble to answer that. She swung herself lithely in the trifling gravitation and began to scramble down into the depths. Utter darkness closed round the pair of them—the complete abysmal dark of lunar night. Then as she descended Vi felt something scraping its way up her body. She had gone below it before she had realized it was a sprung trapdoor opened by the pressure of her body. Chris' feet became visible through it as she switched on her helmet-lamp. Then as they both came below the trap it sprang shut again—

A voice spoke curtly, suddenly. It was a grim merciless voice that neither of them had heard for four years.

"Okay, take your helmets off! There's air down here!"

SLOWLY Vi turned, realized she was now on flat ground, inside an immense underground cave. Lights came up suddenly from roughly slung electric globes. A little distance away across the enormous space was the ship they had been pursuing. Immediately facing her and Chris was a tall man in flying kit, thin-faced, black-haired, sunken-cheeked.

"Welgand!" Vi eyed him for a moment, unscrewed her helmet and shook free her jet black hair. "I guessed it—"

"Still smart, eh, Amazon?" he asked dryly. "And still spoiling for a fight! I figured on that. That's why I frisked those brats of yours. Took me some time to locate your hideout, but I made it at last—"

"Where are they?" Vi broke in venomously. "If you've hurt them in the slightest, Welgand, I'll—"

"Hurt them?" Welgand grinned

crookedly. "I've killed them! That makes you squirm, doesn't it? Killed 'em, I tell you, just as I'll kill you next and this nosey husband of yours! Why did I snatch the brats anyway? Because I figured you'd come blundering after 'em—*Here* where nobody can help you, where no Hotlanders or Venusian jungles can be your allies. Smart, eh?"

Vi hardly heard the most of Welgand's words. "I've killed them!" was the one thing blazing through her brain; and when it registered in its full murderous implication she sprang forward almost involuntarily, gloved hands outflung. With bone-cracking force her fingers closed over Welgand's raygun hand— But in the interval of years he had evidently learned a trick or two.

He bent his knees suddenly, relaxed, then twisted. Vi found herself flung clean over his head; but she fell lightly in the slight gravity and in that time Chris had thrown himself into the attack. He managed to land a slogging punch that send Welgand reeling, but he still held onto his gun.

Then as Vi scrambled to her feet and prepared to leap again she stopped, relaxed. The big underground place had suddenly become alive with men. A dozen at least, all with guns steadily pointed.

"Better take it easy," Welgand advised harshly, straightening up. "Get those space suits off, the pair of you. Al, take their guns!"

CHAPTER II

Solar Vengeance

WHEN the job of frisking had been done Chris and the girl stood passive. But there was a mask of vindictive fury on Vi's face that reminded Welgand of a tigress robbed of her

cubs. He tightened his hold on his gun, jerked his head.

"Get moving!"

Outnumbered, boiling with fury, Chris and Vi obeyed. They crossed the waste of cavern then through a naturally chiseled hole in the rock face. It brought them into an even mightier place. Over their heads at a considerable height was a gray mineral roof, supported on four titanic pillars of pumice rock. In the floor of the cavern, contrived so as to be exactly centered under the mineral roof, was a pit. It was perhaps half a mile across and apparently went down into nothing.

Vi turned from looking into the inexplicable depths.

"Well, get on with it!" she snapped. "Going to throw us down there, I suppose? What are we waiting for?"

Welgand came up with a grim smile. "You underrate me, Amazon," he murmured. "Throwing you down there is not my object, even though it does go right through to a lens on the Moon's other side. It's really quite a clever device, I flatter myself. There are shields controlled from my power-room—"

Vi looked puzzled. "Lens? Right through the Moon?"

"I assure you I have not been idle in these four years— Keep on moving, both of you— up those stone steps there."

Bullied by the guns they moved up the steps indicated and found themselves rising to the level of the mineral roof. A trapdoor in the wall let them through on to the top of it. It was the floor now, not the ceiling—but above was yet another roof of natural mineral.

"Just what is this?" Chris demanded, swinging round. "What's the idea of this glorified ballroom floor business—?"

"Did you notice the center of Tycho's crater floor?" Welgand asked.

"Yeah, sure—Mineral, polished, like frosted glass—" Chris gave a start. "You mean this is it?"

"Above your heads there—the roof," Welgand said. "In all, there are three mineral sections like that here—and a similar set up on the Moon's other side. The mineral is quartz isotope, peculiar to the Moon. I have had them ground into special shapes, these sections. I believe the Moon's streaks and rays are explained by the quartz. I used big proportions of it to make giant lenses. Every condenser lens has three parts, as you know. Below you—this floor—is one lens. Affixed to it and forming the roof of the cavern we just left is the second lens; above in the floor of Tycho is the third lens. A complete giant condenser. And on the other side of the Moon is an identical setup."

"But—but what —?" Chris gazed mystifiedly at the girl.

Welgand gave a grim smile and snapped his fingers. Two of his trigger men came in with immensely strong metal frameworks, perhaps six feet high, and supplied with heavy triple linked chain.

"Fasten 'em up!" he ordered briefly; then watched as Vi and Chris were forced into the frames, their wrists drawn up to the diagonal corners, their ankles likewise. The manacles clicked, left them both spreadeagled with feet barely on the frame bottom.

"THIS time," Welgand said steadily, putting his gun away, "I am going to do the thing properly, Amazon—same to you, Wilson. I had those frames made specially of hardened triple-x steel, proof against even your muscles, I guess."

"Suppose you quit driveling and tell us what the idea is?" Vi suggested bitterly.

"Okay." Welgand's thin face dark-

ened. "Because of you, Amazon, my schemes for the domination of the world collapsed: I was forced to dash into space as a fugitive. Only one thing was left for me—revenge! Revenge on you and the Earth which outlawed me! For four years I have worked on this scheme, gathered a few men around me—fugitive engineers and suchlike. To cut it short, we decided to use the natural quartz of the Moon for a giant lens. We bored a tunnel right through the Moon, a tunnel specially arranged to dead center on this giant lens. It was not difficult because the Moon is honeycombed with pumic rock anyway. When the shields in the tunnel are withdrawn—actuated by my power house machinery—the sun when at the zenith on the other side of the Moon—that is new Moon to Earth—shines right down the tunnel as a single ray and passes through these lenses."

"Well?" Chris said that, uncomprehending. But the girl's face was becoming strained as she glimpsed the underlying idea.

"Tomorrow—that is in two hours—it will be absolute new moon," Welgand said slowly. "And tomorrow is the twentieth of February, 2064. There is a total eclipse of the sun on the Earth. So, when I withdraw my shields—"

"A cosmic burning glass!" Vi cried in horror, suddenly getting at the truth. "A ray of concentrated solar power and heat burning through the moon, gathered into focus by these lenses and—"

"And concentrated on Earth, since this side of the Moon obviously faces the Earth at all times." Welgand gave a merciless grin. "Revenge! The mightiest revenge one man ever took—! A ray, sweeping at two thousand miles an hour across the world! First Alaska, across the Pacific, across the United States—to Europe— Yes, across the most populated parts of the world. And

deep in the umbra's absolute cone shadow will lie death! A burning trail will be left everywhere the total eclipse passes, just as a sunlight recording globe leaves a charred trail along its chart. Magnificent, is it not?"

"You're mad!" Chris shouted desperately, struggling futilely to tear himself loose from the chains. "You can't do this thing, Welgand—"

"I'm not mad, just ingenious," he said softly. "And . . . embittered. I have arranged it so that you will be the first to feel the shaft of unthinkable heat as it blasts up the tunnel to these lenses. Being between the lenses you will char to cinders. A few seconds later when the beam hits Earth others will die— Those damnable, stinking others who outlawed me! Total eclipse is right. Now you know why I brought you here."

Welgand stopped, turned away sharply to the metal trapdoor in the wall, slammed and bolted it behind him. The two were alone in the dim yellow light of a single power bulb. And that bulb—clever thought!—was placed directly over an electric clock. It clicked steadily as it chopped off half seconds.

"A FIEND!" Chris whispered. "That's what he's become, Vi— No longer a master scientist with a criminal brain, but a monster! First he kills our kids, chains us up like this, then— Do you realize hundreds of the Earth's best scientists will be watching the eclipse and will get the full blast of the ray? Moving at two thousand miles an hour there'll be hardly a chance to get clear of it—!"

"That obviously is part of the inhuman ingenuity of the idea," Vi said slowly. "Only thing I do not believe is that he killed the babies: that was put in to torture us. He's got more sense than destroy children with such possi-

bilities—" She came suddenly to action. "Somehow we've got to move! We've got to! Everything depends on it—"

With that she looked up and studied her wrists drawn diagonally up over her head. She pulled with all her strength on the chains, but Welgand had been right. They were proof against her muscles this time. And again, the frames were so designed as to make any real effort impossible. Time and again Vi threw herself into the effort, but without success. Her feet hardly touched the frame bottom anyway.

"No dice?" Chris asked hollowly.

"Nope. Seems Welgand has— Wait a minute!" A gleam came into the girl's eyes. "There may be one trick he forgot—the lesser gravity! It's worth a try."

Puzzled, Chris watched her. She lurched herself back and forth violently until the entire frame toppled over, slamming her spreadeagled on her back.

"What's the good of that?" Chris demanded, staring down as he saw her gathering her supple body for a tremendous effort.

"Just this— Pulling downwards against my wrists *towards* gravity, and with my feet nearly clear of the ground, was useless. But lying flat and tugging horizontally I've got the gravity as my advantage. I've got about three times the normal pulling power which should compensate for the extra thickness of chain— Here we go!"

Chris watched with bated breath as she suddenly threw everything she had got into the muscles of her arms. It was an amazing sight as she dragged on the frame like one racked. Harder—harder, until the tendons and veins stood out on her arms and shoulders, until her face began to flush with the strain.

Then came that sound Chris had so often heard before — the creaking,

crafting grind of metal parting along its forged ends. Again! Vi was like a stretched spring— *Again!* And the chains holding her wrists snapped abruptly. She relaxed instantly, breathing hard.

AFTER a moment or two she was herself again, sat up and wrenched at the chains on her ankles. They gave way at last and she stood up, manacles still on her wrists and legs. She gave a ghostly smile.

"Chains do not a prison make," she misquoted. "Now let's see what we can do with you. . . ."

It was easier with Chris for their combined efforts went to work. In a few minutes he was free, stood up beside the girl as she massaged her grazed and bleeding wrists.

"Now for Welgand," Chris breathed ominously, staring round the gray expanse.

They hurried to the metal door. That it was locked they had fully expected since they'd heard Welgand slam the bolts. The girl pulled at it, shook her head, thought. Then her eyes wandered to the ticking electric clock.

"Yes, it's a chance," she murmured. "Put that clock out of action and a fuse will blow somewhere in Welgand's powerhouse. He'll be sure to investigate—or send somebody to do it. Part of the essential torture, don't forget. Right! Stand by that door. Moment somebody comes in shut it and leave the rest to me."

She turned, gave a mighty leap against the weak gravity. It carried her up momentarily to the clock. She drove her fist right into its face to the accompaniment of a blinding flash, then dropped back to the lens floor. In a moment she was at the door opposite Chris, her body quivering expectantly.

Her hunch had been right for pres-

ently there came sounds outside the door. Bolts slammed; the door opened. Two trigger men came straight with leveled guns. The moment they saw the fallen, empty frames they stopped and stared.

"What in hell—?" one of them started to say; then he broke off with a gurgling grunt as a yellow arm hooked out of the gloom and crushed under his bristly chin. His companion was no better off, for as he turned an arm hooked under his jaw too.

Turning ever so slightly both men could see the face of the girl between their own. It was wearing an expression that struck horror deep into their souls.

"Take—take it easy, Amazon," the one gasped, striving frantically to free himself. "I've—I've nothing against you—"

"I've plenty against you though," she breathed. "No quarter this time! It's not plain crime anymore but massacre and baby snatching—*my* babies!"

Chris clanged the door shut and waited with folded arms.

The girl released one of the men suddenly, snatched at his gun. She missed it. He raised it, but not quickly enough for she raised the other man off his feet and flung him clean on top of the exploding weapon. He dropped, a hole burned through his chest.

Gun jolted from his hand the other man made a dash for it, until in two enormous leaps Vi caught up on him. He crashed to his knees, felt fingers of steel creep into his neck, tighter—tighter, until the cavern swam in a roaring tide. . . .

Vi released him suddenly, stood up with a grim face. Turning she picked up the two rayguns, tossed one to Chris as he stood looking at her.

"Yes, they're dead," she said curtly, interpreting his expression. "Sorry to

outrage those precious civilized notions of yours but I'm playing the game my way this time. I'll destroy this Welgand menace forever, or die doing it. Come on!"

SHE snatched open the metal door and together they hurried down the steps—but warily—to the next lens. Nobody intercepted them— So down to the main cavern floor where lay the tunnel-pit. A triggerman on guard suddenly jumped to his feet. That was as far as he got.

One hand knocked his gun flying; a fist shot out into his jaw and knocked him blinded and breathless against the cavern wall. Then Vi had him by the neck, forced him to stand upright.

"One chance for your life, ugly mug," she breathed. "Where's Welgand's powerroom located? Come on, come on!" She slammed him mercilessly back and forth across the face as he hesitated.

"Wait—wait a minute! I'll show you— Lay off me! This way."

"Hurry!" the girl snapped, her ray-gun ready.

The man fled before her and Chris across the cavern and to a low balcony of rock. A little way along it he stopped and pointed to a set of some twenty steps leading down to a metal door in a crevice below.

"In there?" Chris gasped. "Hell! Rock and metal! It's invincible!"

"May not be; depends on this guy," the girl retorted. She prodded him significantly. "Go on, yell out. Tell Welgand he's wanted. Quick!"

The thug hesitated, measuring her, then he nodded and shouted loudly.

"Hey, Chief! Quick! Come on out—!"

The girl glanced towards the door to watch—and that was the movement the thug had been awaiting. Like a flash

he landed out his fist, sent the girl spinning back against the rocky wall helplessly, her gun flying out of her hand. He started to run for it then, away along the gallery—but Chris was ready for that. He leveled his gun, fired. He felt a grim little thrill as he saw the smoky patch on the gangster's back. He dropped flat, motionless.

"Chris—out of sight!" Vi panted. "Before Welgand sees us. We've got to entice him out and slip in while he's away— Look out!"

They both flattened themselves in the shadow of the rocky wall as the power room door in the crevice below opened. Welgand stood silhouetted against a glare from within. He waited. So did Vi and Chris, hoping against hope he'd come forward and investigate. Now they had lost their stooge they could do nothing to prompt him.

But at last, to their burning chagrin, he shrugged and went back in again, slammed the door resolutely.

CHAPTER III

Desperate Straits

"DAMN!" Chris swore. "Evidently he didn't think it was very important, else he didn't get all the words through that thick door. What do we do now? Reckoning three of these low-lifers out of the way there must be nine of 'em in with him. No others around here. How do we get him out?"

"I don't know." Vi looked rather desperate. "Time's flying too—"

Chris snapped his fingers. "Welgand's spaceship! It's still in the cavern back there—"

"So what?"

"Get a raygun machine from it and melt that darned door down!"

"Um—he did blaze away with it back on Venus. Probably we could detach

it—" Vi shook her dark head abruptly. "No use. By the time we'd gotten through the door Welgand would be all set to blast us— But there's another angle to the ship," she went on, turning and heading swiftly along the gallery. "It has space radio. If we don't manage to break down that door, or anything should happen to us, we can at least warn Earth to stand clear of the eclipse track and evacuate those in its path."

"Still doesn't solve how we bust that door open," Chris said worriedly, hurrying beside her. "We could imitate a voice to get him out only he might rumble the ruse—"

"We'll think of something: this is more important right now."

In a few moments they were back in the main cavern, hurried over to where Welgand's ship still stood. It was all set and in order, space radio fully equipped. Chris closed the airlock for safety as the girl settled before the instruments and switched on.

"Welgand's radio will probably be in his powerhouse," she reflected. "Here's to hoping he hasn't got it on so he won't know what we're up to here."

She depressed the signal button on the Earth short-wave band and an answer soon came in the speaker. She cut it down to low tone.

"Calling Emergency Radio Station at Heaviside," she intoned. "This is the Golden Amazon speaking from the Moon. No time for explanations: just listen. Clear all people and valuables from the track of the total eclipse of the sun due to begin in about two hours. Dispatch an emergency squad at once to pick up Welgand, fugitive from Earth. That is all. Repeat please."

The operator gave it back word for word. The girl broke contact, thought a moment, then said,

"May help to save plenty of lives anyway, if not all of them. Even at that

millions of dollars' worth of property will go up in smoke unless we somehow get into that power room— We've got to do it suddenly, surprisingly, get Welgand off his guard so we can force the truth about the children out of him. Come on—see what we can do."

"Bit queer he doesn't come to see what happened to those guys who came to look at the clock, isn't it?" Chris puzzled, as they returned along the narrow gallery.

Vi shrugged. "Probably they're outside men—spend their time in and around these galleries. He'll think they looked the job over and went back to their posts. Never suspect we got away."

She paused as they came into the shadows of the gallery and stood looking down at the power-room door.

"Looks hopeless to me," Chris muttered.

Vi did not reply immediately: she was studying the four massive pillars which supported the enormous quartz lens back in the cavern. Then as her gaze moved back to the gallery her eyes sharpened.

"Take a look . . ."

Chris stared at an immense boulder of rock jutting out of the rock face almost immediately behind them. It was enormous in size, like a pear-shaped protuberance.

"If that were free we might use it," Vi murmured.

"What! Anyway, how do you propose to loosen it? It's too heavy to move even in this light gravity—"

"Might break it free with our ray-guns."

VI set to work immediately and with a shrug Chris followed suit. They fired charge after charge at the pumice-like rock—silent shafts of flame that hurled dust and chippings into the air.

Their guns were about burned out and useless when they had finished, but the neck around the boulder root had narrowed immensely.

The girl nodded when she had studied it, shoved at it. Nothing happened. She tried again, pushing mightily. There followed a cracking, splintering sound and the boulder, all of twenty feet high, dropped suddenly from its hold in the rock face and rolled ponderously for a short distance.

"Now what?" Chris demanded; then he looked worriedly at the rock face. "Say, we've fissured it a hell of a lot. If the cracks widen at all—"

"Be hanged to that. Give me a hand."

He only grasped what she was aiming at when their combined efforts edged the vast thing directly in line with the steps leading down to the power-room door. Then Vi pushed at it with her back, dug her heels in the floor and shoved. Once, twice— Three times. Then it toppled over the top step, sent her sprawling. Instantly she scrambled up and they both watched in awe as it pelted and bounced down the steps faster and faster—

It crashed into the metal door with cyclonic impact, ripped it clean off its hinges and took part of the frame with it.

"Now!" Vi yelled. "Quick as you can go—"

She jumped as she spoke, went flying through the air and landed on the top of the now stationary boulder. In a moment she had slid down it and into the power-room. Without a second's hesitation she leapt again, clean on top of Welgand as he stood glancing round expectantly, obviously off his guard by the sudden onslaught.

He hardly had a chance, so fast did things happen. The girl's bunched fist struck him clean in the jaw as he waited

with hand on his gun holster. Back of her blow was all the steel-spring strength of her supernatural muscles. Welgand lifted right off his feet, head jerked back and arms sprawling. He collided with a switchboard and brought up sharp. It saved him from falling. He let out a mighty yell.

Chris appeared suddenly, dived for the nearest gangster coming up to lend assistance. In a flying tackle Chris brought him to his knees. A lightning uppercut brought the man's teeth together with a click; he fell again, dazed and bewildered.

But now the place seemed to be spawning trigger-men. The girl, clutching the dazed Welgand, found herself abruptly beleaguered with pointing ray-guns. She whirled like lightning, gripped Welgand by his pants belt and held him in front of her as a shield.

"Okay," she panted, raising him so that his feet kicked helplessly off the floor. "It's up to you mugs now— Come over here, Chris! Up to you mugs, I say! First, where are those babies of mine—?" Then as the men scowled furiously she yelled, "I'll give you five seconds! And I'm in no mood for niceties! Five seconds and I lam Welgand's head on the floor so hard it'll mash his brains— *Come on!*"

Welgand struggled desperately in her iron grip at the words. Her only response was to raise him even higher.

"One . . ." she breathed implacably. "Two—!"

"Hey, Amazon! Better take it easy!"

SHE looked up sharply beyond the nearer trigger-men to yet another gangster at the far end of the instrument-littered place. Her breath caught as she saw him holding the two babies on high, one in each hand.

"Checkmate!" he yelled. "They're alive and kicking—but they won't be

unless you release the Chief. Come on, get wise to yourself!"

Vi hesitated, in a quandary. Finally she released Welgand so abruptly he thumped to the floor. He got to his feet with a livid face, holding his anguishing jaw.

"If you know what's good for you you'll hand my babies over," Vi snapped.

"What the hell do you think we are?" Welgand sneered. He glanced at the gangster. "You hang onto 'em, Curly—"

"Why, you—"

Vi flung herself blindly towards the two children struggling in the man's hands, but this time sheer desperation upset her calculations. A foot shot out and tripped her. The next moment her arms were bent tightly behind her. Four of the gangsters pinned her down by main strength, panted and puffed as they bound her thrashing limbs. At last she was pinioned, forced to her feet. She looked savagely across at Chris and beheld him in the same plight.

"I don't just know how you got away from that frame, Amazon," Welgand said slowly, his voice deadly; "but I do know you'll get no further than this power-room. I'm taking no more chances. You can watch me operate the eclipse-ray from here. When that is done and you've seen the full layout of my vengeance I'll settle with you—fully!" He rubbed his jaw again furiously; it felt as though it were broken.

"Listen, Welgand," Vi said, straining forward. "I'm making no deals—that isn't my way; but I'll do anything you want if you'll only give my two kids a break. You said before that you'd killed them—I guessed that was for torture value, and now I've proved it. What do you want me to do?"

"There's nothing you can do to get

out of this," Welgand retorted. "The only break either of you will get is in the neck— As for your two brats, I've got a future for them. I'll bring them up my way—"

"Your way!" Vi shouted. "Crime, villainy, murder—"

"My way," Welgand repeated stonily. "They're exceptional kids, being yours. A boy and a girl of a superrace to come—the strength of ten men. Venus-reared—swift, intelligent, cruel and terrible as the saber toothed tiger if trained the right way—my way. Your kids, Amazon! What better vengeance than that their whole lives he devoted to the very thing you have tried to destroy? I foresee a superrace of men and women under my orders. Good eh?" Welgand grinned tauntingly, then he remembered his jaw and winced instead.

"You'll not make it, Welgand," the girl whispered. "I'll get you somehow. Even if you kill me I'll come back. I'll break you in the end! Those are my babies—a new race, yes—but destined to found an empire of magnificent man and womanhood between them when I get too old to fight anymore. You shall not have them!"

"That's what you think," Welgand answered callously; then he glanced at his watch. "Anyway, I've no time for argument. Eclipse time is in ten minutes. Make yourselves comfortable," he added dryly, as they stood pinioned helplessly before him.

BITTERLY they stood watching as he turned to his control board. It was not particularly elaborate, was obviously meant to operate an immense level-mechanism at the far end of the laboratory.

"This moves the shields aside from the lenses," Welgand said in explanation. "It— You listening, Amazon?"

She jerked her eyes from the two infants still in the grip of the grinning trigger-man farther down the laboratory.

"I heard you, yes," she retorted. "You pull the shields aside, the sun sends its power through the tunnel and—"

"In exactly eight more minutes," Welgand nodded. "Then . . ."

He paused, frowning a little as from somewhere there came a dull cracking sound. It was followed by a heavy rumbling bump—then silence.

"What was that?" He wheeled round on his men.

"Only some rocks tumbling away when you moved the shield, I guess," one of them answered.

Welgand reflected, then nodded. He closed another switch and a window on the far wall sprang into view as a steel shutter shot back. Beyond it was dead black.

"There you see the inside of the shaft," he explained. "You will see the sunlight pass up it— Ah! Notice that pearly haze? That is the beginning!"

Breathing hard, Chris and Vi waited. The girl strained and tugged at her cords as she watched first the snicking clock over the switchboard and then the gathering glow on the inspection-window. She knew there could never have been time on Earth to clear everybody out of the way to safety. Havoc beyond imagination would be inevitable the instant the umbra of the eclipse struck the Earth.

She pulled again, tautened her arms—then her eyes caught sight of Curly holding the babies. He shook his head negatively. It was a threat—possibly bluff—but Vi realized she could take no chances. Again she relaxed, wishing she could not hear the merciless click—click—click of the timepiece.

Welgand and his men stood in ghoul-

ish satisfaction as the pearly glow deepened. It became creamy, then white; until at last the first direct ray streamed through. Instantly the window became blindingly brilliant as the effulgence poured up the shaft.

"Wonderful!" Welgand breathed. "My supreme moment! The consummation of four years' hard work."

"Yeah, you said it, Chief!"

"Serve those boiled shirt scientists right!"

"If ever there was a dirty rotten swine, it's you, Welgand," Chris panted. "You ought to be damned well—"

Welgand reached forward, slapped Chris across the face with such force that he fell helplessly on his back. He turned and glared up—then Welgand's eyes shifted to the girl. He met the steely stare of her deep blue eyes.

"Better lay off me, Welgand," she breathed. "You've already done enough. If I ever catch up on you—!"

"Not where you're going, Amazon," Welgand said calmly. "I've one more surprise to spring on you—and this weak-kneed husband of yours. That window opens inward into the shaft—"

Vi looked at it, startled.

"You guessed it," Welgand commented grimly. "I decided you should die by the same system that destroyed my Earthly foes. That you escaped the lenses does not mean you will escape the method— The concentrated heat down that moon shaft will kill you, slowly—far more slowly than would have been the case on the lens. Both of you will die in that shaft. I guess you crossed me for the last time, Amazon!"

He waited a moment, added shortly, "Okay, boys—go to it."

TWO of the men moved instantly, hauled the girl up between them and carried her struggling, wriggling

form to the window, dropped her under it by the wall. Then they did the same for Chris. Welgand came up, yanked the girl up by her ropes and grinned at her taut, furious face.

"Bit of a come-down for the mighty Amazon, eh?" he asked dryly; then his face setting like granite he raised her suddenly in his arms to the level of the window. Her feet indeed were pressing on the glass when something happened— It was so sudden it drowned out Chris' wild cry of alarm.

It sounded like a vast explosion from somewhere above the power-room and was followed by a crumbling, grumbling roar that rose with the seconds and set the floor shaking. Small rocks began to bounce through the shattered doorway and rolled across the floor; clouds of choking dust followed them.

"A moonquake!" Curly yelled hoarsely, springing up. "Quick, Chief, we've gotta get outa here—"

Welgand looked round in alarm, then dropped the helpless girl back to the floor. In his anxiety he seemed suddenly oblivious to his heinous scheme of destruction and vengeance. Thinking only of himself now he raced across the quivering floor as the din increased, snatched the two children from the arms of the running Curly, and with one bound was with them over the rock blocking the door.

He was the only one that got through. The hell exploded suddenly into an onslaught of stones and rock, burying not only Curly but the rest of the men as they made belated moves to reach safety.

CHAPTER IV

Settling of Accounts

"LOOKS bad, Vi," Chris panted, squirming to free himself. "We—" "Lie flat!" the girl shouted hoarsely,

glancing up suddenly, and simultaneously she pressed herself as low as possible to the floor.

Not a second too soon for the immense laboratory roof suddenly split its entire length, demolished itself in a hail of rocks and boulders that crumbled inward. The whole Moon seemed to be sliding and shifting. Chris winced as the pumicey stuff rained down on top of him, burying him, filling his mouth and ears with dust and chippings. Bound as he was he found himself utterly pinned when at last the disturbance began to show signs of ending.

"Vi!" His voice was choked and muffled. "Vi, you still around?"

"Yeah—lie still a moment . . ."

Then Chris heard the crack and clink of stone as the girl heaved and twisted herself out of the mass. In a while he heard her labored breathing . . . then the pressure upon him began to lighten as she flung away the stones at top speed, finally dragged him to his feet. He saw broken ends of cord clinging now along with the manacle cuffs to her wrists and ankles.

"Won't be a second," she panted, and snapped his cords through like string. "Easy enough to escape these cords now the rayguns are not trained on us— Guess we can thank the light gravity for not being crushed under this lot— There! We're ready!"

Chris stared round him dazedly. The laboratory was a shambles. The entire roof had fallen in, leaving it open to the cavern beyond. Here and there an arm or leg sticking from the debris testified to the fate of the rest of Welgand's stooges.

"Don't know whether they're dead or not—no time to look," Vi snapped. "Welgand got the kids and that's all we need to know—"

She caught Chris' arm and they blundered across the fallen rubble into the

cavern. Now they saw more clearly what had happened. One of the four immense rock pillars supporting the lowest quartz lens had snapped in twain, bringing down half the wall with it.

"A miniature cataclysm," Chris breathed. "Say, that rock we pulled out must have started it. I warned you about that fissure—"

Vi did not even seem to notice. She stared at the blank space where Welgand's ship had been.

"Gone! I expected it— He wouldn't stop to move the *Ultra* anyway, so that's our last hope. Come on!"

"We've no spacesuits, though," Chris exclaimed, as he followed her up the shaft giving egress to the surface.

"We're going to chance it," she retorted. "You can stay here if you want. I'm stronger than you."

He had not known her brutal frankness was born of desperation he'd have answered hotly. As it was he remained silent, but followed just the same.

"It won't be easy," Vi said, as they went on up. "It means a brief climb and a run in sheer void and zero cold—but it can be done! Free space is a perfect insulator of heat; you radiate heat faster than it can escape. A body can stay in space for a while without bursting: depends how strong the body is— Yes, I can risk it. The slighter gravity will help in making a prodigious dash."

SHE stopped speaking as the trap was reached. She tugged it down, hesitated a second, then plunged through. Chris followed her—into hell. Blinding cold wrapped him immediately. He felt the searing vacuum of the airless lunar night, gulped and struggled to hold his breath. He floundered, almost fell, his head singing with iron bands clamped round it.

He was dimly aware that the girl stooped, whipped him up and bundled him up the remainder of the rocky slope: then holding onto him tightly she leapt—once, twice—three times, hurled by her more than human leg muscles. But even she was weakening noticeably as she fumbled through the *Ultra's* outer airlock.

Chris floundered through the last airlock and lay gulping on the control room floor. He looked up blearily as the girl followed him, spun the lock screws. Blood was trickling from her nose.

"Guess it's the last time I want to try that," she panted. "I thought I was going to blow apart any minute— Get the restorative out while I pick up that scum, Welgand."

By the time Chris had handed over the glass of restorative the girl had the *Ultra* sweeping over the Tycho crater. She glanced below momentarily.

"Looks as though that quake put Welgand's infernal mirror out of focus anyway," she said briefly. "No sign of a ray, even though there is an eclipse cone— Ah! There he is!" Her eyes narrowed vengefully as she stared ahead.

"Heading to Venus," Chris murmured. "I get it! He thinks we passed out and figures on taking the kids there to bring them up where they can get the Venusian radiation—" He paused as he looked rearwards. "Hallo! Space patrol—Earth ships. Heading Moonward—"

"The ones I sent for," Vi nodded. She switched on her space radio. "Hallo there, Earth patrol! Amazon calling—*Ultra* about a hundred miles ahead of you. Drop two parties to look over the lunar interior setup; the rest of you follow me as well as you can. Welgand has got away again."

"Say, Amazon, what goes on?" demanded an officer's voice. "We cleared

all the folks out of the eclipse track—many as we could anyway. We were in space when the eclipse began. That ray showed momentarily then veered off sideways and went out—”

“No time to explain now,” Vi retorted. “Follow me!”

She switched off, clamped her hand down on the power lever and set it moving up notch by notch. With terrific overpowering speed the little machine whizzed ever faster through the void, eating up the distance, leaving the police squad far behind as their numbers broke up.

“More distance we can cover before Welgand gets wise that we’re on his tail and the better,” Vi panted. “More ahead we are of the police and the better, too. This is my tea-party, and no hounds of the law are going to spoil it. Just wait!”

She slipped the lever to the last notch, hardly seemed to notice the appalling pressure so tense was her whole being on the job of settling accounts with the fleeing scientist.

Welgand’s space machine, fast though it was, began to lose ground to the *Ultra*. At first it was a puzzle to Vi, then she snapped her fingers. “Because of the children!” she exclaimed. “He dare not use full power. Last time he had a vast head start which kept him ahead; this time he hasn’t . . . Hallo, what’s that?”

Evidently he had become aware of pursuit for from the rear of his machine there suddenly blazed the livid flare of a raygun.

“I guessed he’d do that,” the girl muttered, plunging dizzily to miss the long-distance beam. “He knows I can’t hit back in case we blow the kids up too.”

SHE swerved again, careened in a mighty arc. Her jaw set as she heard one of the *Ultra*’s outer plates go

tearing off under a transient glancing blast of withering fire. And now she was commencing to overtake Welgand’s machine in leaps and bounds: she cut speed a little, manipulated the rocket controls with all the skill at her command to dodge his repeated fire.

“Just what do you figure on doing, Vi?” Chris demanded, rising up from the wall bed as the speed decreased. “We can’t keep up this cat and dog act forever: he’ll blast our vitals for sure with a lucky hit. Then what?”

“I’ve got the thing figured,” she answered quickly. “I can’t blast his ship itself, but I *can* blast his airlock. There are three of ’em, remember. Once I’ve opened the outer one I’ll get through the other two in double quick time—”

“But he’ll guess the idea!”

“No; that’s where you come in.” She sprang up and motioned to the control board. Chris took over the controls as she scrambled into a space suit.

“Your job is to distract his attention,” she went on earnestly. “Keep his aim fixed on this ship: do all you can to dodge him. Leave the rest to me. This is my personal job!”

Before Chris could say anything she screwed on her helmet, picked up a heavy sub-standard raygun and fastened it to her waist. Carefully she made her way to the emergency lock away from the view of Welgand’s machine; then slipped herself out into space and hung onto her lifeline.

Automatically the gravity of the *Ultra* kept her close to it. She waited, hanging onto the rope while Chris writhed and plunged the ship around, maneuvering at last so that he came up under the belly of Welgand’s machine.

Vi was waiting for that vital second. She thrust her feet against the *Ultra* and the recoil whizzed her across the briefly narrow gap. Simultaneously she let go of her lifeline and clung onto the

projections round Welgand's ship's airlock. She was pretty sure he had not seen her, busy as he was at the rear of the vessel and with its external center hidden from his view.

Smiling grimly inside her helmet Vi hooked one arm around the lock hinge and went to work with the heavy gun. White heat blistered round the clamps of the operculum. Metal began to flow in a white hot pool as the machine continued to hurtle onwards through the void. Time and again the *Ultra* came whizzing round, plunging and sweeping the abyss. Far away the police squad was commencing to catch up—

Then the lock gave. The girl slid inside the vessel quickly, whipped out her ordinary raygun and held it tightly. As she had hoped, the second airlock was double levered, openable from inside and out. She went past it quickly, shut it and took off her helmet. The last door faced her.

Abruptly she flung it open—
"Reach, Welgand!"

WELGAND, the two infants on chairs on either side of him, swung around violently from his raygun mechanism. An astounded expression came over his cruel vindictive visage.

"Amazon! How in hell did you—?"

He raised his arms slowly and the girl moved forward; then even as she did so his left hand dropped and whipped out his gun. He upped and fired simultaneously from the hip.

His guess was right in one sense: the girl did not dare fire back in case she hit her babies: but Welgand's own lightning movement was too swift. He blistered paint and metal on the wall beside the girl as she leapt like a tigress to one side—

Nor did she stop leaping. She jumped again the moment she hit the floor, tossed her gun on the switch-

board bench and lammed out with her right fist.

It caught Welgand on his already injured jaw just a fraction of a second after he had tried to dodge. The result was he spun like a top, his gun flying out of his fist. He reached for his remaining right-hand gun but it was too late. Vi's hand closed round his wrist like a vise, exerted a crushing pressure that grew worse with the seconds. His face lifted in anguish and round came her fist clean into it, sent him hurtling backwards helplessly against the wall.

He brought up with a jolt that shook his teeth. His hair was tumbled; he was sweating violently. He realized now he was not looking on a woman at all, but the real superhuman jungle female who at heart was still a savage of the Venusian jungles. Her face was the nearest thing to a human tigress he had ever seen.

"We've a score to settle, Welgand—a long outstanding one," she said in a low voice. "You were going to steal my babies, poison their lives, make super-criminals out of them. I warned you what would happen when I caught up on you—"

"Wait, Amazon—wait a minute!" Welgand fought for breath. "We can settle this thing without violence. You don't have to be a murderess—"

Vi wasted no more time on his panicky drooling. Frantically though he tried to avoid her she vaulted after him, right and left across the control room, caught up on him and brought him to his knees at last with her forearm hooked under his chin. Her knee crushed mercilessly into the small of his back. He recognized that favorite hold of hers—a strangling backward pressure that no human being had ever yet escaped.

"Amazon! *Amazon!*" he screamed

huskily, choking. "In God's name—!"

Tighter her arm closed, and tighter. Welgand could no longer speak. The world was roaring in his anguished ears—flaming pain burned the length of his spine— Then amazingly the whole thing relaxed and he tumbled spent and gasping to the floor.

HE had an idea there were voices, furious cries from the girl. He shook his befuddled head and got up slowly, quivering still from the expectancy of death that had gripped him. Now he saw the sullen, bitter faced girl in the grip of a party of police officers—space police. And Chris Wilson himself.

"What's the idea?" Vi blazed, glaring around. "Want this guy to escape as he did last time? Let me finish the job! He's got to die!"

"Not at your hands, though, Vi," Chris insisted. "That's plain jungle law—and there are proper laws. You've got to obey them."

Welgand stood listening, rubbing his aching neck. He dropped his hand to the switchboard bench to support himself—and his hand dropped right on the girl's gun. Surprised he looked at it; then he whipped it up—but Vi was a second quicker seeing his action a shade sooner.

She ripped free of the now lax grip on her arms, bunched her right fist and drove it out like a piston rod. Even one of her feet left the floor with the terrific power she put behind it. It was the most astounding punch Chris had ever seen, and he'd seen plenty. Just as though she had blown everything in one vast colossal effort.

Welgand's head jerked back like a

punch-bag. His teeth clicked loudly. He shot rather than toppled away from the group, crashed into the opposite wall with his mouth welling blood. Like a rag doll he crumpled motionless to the floor.

"Whew, was that dynamite!" Chris whistled, as the girl stood shaking her hand painfully.

"Should have been," she replied fervently. "I've broken three of my knuckles."

The officer-in-charge went over to Welgand and studied him briefly. He got up and shrugged.

"Broken neck," he said briefly. "Either the punch or else the switchboard."

"But it was self-defense," the girl said slowly. "It was not murder. He pulled a gun on us. Right?"

The officer nodded slowly, gave a grim smile. "Saved the Earth a job of work, Amazon. But you'd better watch yourself in future with those muscles of yours. May get you into trouble."

"Not again," she answered quietly. "That was probably my last big wallop. I'm all through fighting now Welgand's washed-up. My next fights will be domestic—training these two kids of mine to become the forerunners of a super race."

The officer smiled again as she picked the children up in her strong arms, petted them affectionately.

"Anyway," he said, thinking, "that'll be twenty years from now and I won't be on the space force then. If they're anything like their mother I'll count that in my favor. But joking aside, Amazon, you've finished a masterly job. Good luck to you—in fact all four of you!"

When Mr. Ayre sent us this story from bomb-wracked London, he asked us what we thought of the idea of continuing the adventures of these two amazing children of the Golden Amazon. We leave it to you. Why not drop us a line and tell us what you think about it?—The Editors.

ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS....Cerium

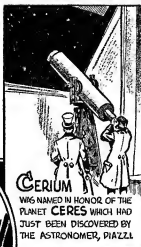


SCHREED, SWEDISH WIZARD OF SCIENCE FAILED TO DETECT CERIUM IN CERITE WHEN A SAMPLE OF THAT ORE, TAKEN FROM AN IRON MINE AT BASTNAS SWEDEN, WAS SENT HIM FOR ANALYSIS IN 1781 BY WILHELM HISINGER, THEN 15 YEARS OLD. TWENTY TWO YEARS LATER, HISINGER HIMSELF, SEARCHING FOR YTTRIA IN THE SAME OLD MINE, FOUND DEFINITE TRACES OF CERIOUS OXIDE. SEVENTY-TWO YEARS MORE ELAPSED BEFORE THE PURE METAL WAS ISOLATED. . . .



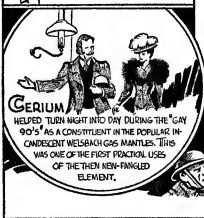
CERIUM'S

AMAZING ABILITY TO THROW OFF SHOWERS OF SPARKS MAKES IT A NATURAL FOR POCKET CIGARETTE LIGHTERS, THIS IS ITS "BIG-TIME" USE. 0.15% CERIUM IN ALLOY WITH ALUMINIUM-COPPER-NICKEL-IRON-MAGNESIUM-SILICON IS A PENCE MAKER; HELPS ALUMINIUM AND IRON MERGE BETTER, GIVES A SMOOTH, CLEAN SURFACE; A BEAUTIFUL METAL FOR DIE AND CHILL-CASTINGS.



CERIUM

WAS NAMED IN HONOR OF THE PLANET CERES WHICH HAD JUST BEEN DISCOVERED BY THE ASTRONOMER, PIAZZI



CERIUM

HELPED TURN NIGHT INTO DAY DURING THE "GAY 90'S" AS A CONSTITUENT IN THE POPULAR INCANDESCENT WELSBACH GAS MANTLES. THIS WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PRACTICAL USES OF THE THEN NEW-FANGLED ELEMENT.



A JEKYL AND HYDE ELEMENT

IN MACHINE GUN TRACER BULLETS, CERIUM IS "PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE" TO HOSTILE AIRCRAFT. IT IS PUBLIC BENEFACTOR NUMBER ONE, HOWEVER, IN ITS OXALATE FORM WHEN USED TO RELIEVE INDIGESTION, SEA SICKNESS, GASTRIC ULCERS, EPILEPSY.

CERIUM is number 58 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ce and its atomic weight is 140.25. It melts at 623°C . It burns brilliantly when heated in the form of wire, and is a powerful reducing agent. It is of an iron-grey color, about as soft as lead, and is attacked slowly by cold water and more rapidly by hot water. It forms alloys with other metals, best known being that with iron because of its property of giving off showers of sparks when struck or filed. It is the most common of the "rare earths." It is purified by careful boiling of the mixed nitrates with potassium bromate and adding coarsely ground marble. It is used in the manufacture of Welsbach mantles, in ceramic and textile industries, in medicine, to cure seasickness.

Next issue—The Romance of Cesium

DR. KELTON—

"IT takes courage!" said Dr. Kelton. His eyes, steely slits behind thick glasses, peered across the table to find out what effect the words were having on Roger Cass.

"There comes that awful period of time when you are neither dead nor alive," he went on. "That frightening moment when you first see the world through the eyes of another . . ."

Roger Cass thought he saw the man's thin lips curl cynically beneath the straggling mustache.

"Damn him. Why all this talk of courage?" he wondered. "What is he up to now?"

Aloud, Cass said, "Why go over all that? The 'sensator' is a success. It is completed." He picked up a silvery metal helmet from the table. "Yesterday's experiment proved that."

The helmet was shaped to fit snugly over the head. Its interior was lined with a mesh of tiny filaments and wires.

Yesterday, Cass had seen that helmet placed upon the head of Zany Luke, the loutish half-wit who lived alone in a cabin two miles deeper into the mountains. An identical helmet had been placed upon Dr. Kelton's head. Roger Cass had closed a switch . . . and a miracle had happened.

Within two minutes after Cass had closed the switch, Dr. Kelton's thin lips were babbling out hill-billy astonishment at his predicament; and Zany Luke, the simple-minded mountaineer, was speaking in the cultured tones of a man of letters!

The transference of consciousness from one man to the other had been complete!

Magic? Yes. The magic of years

of scientific research and of six months of trying work in the laboratory-cabin isolated deep in the Ozark hills. . . .

Cass placed the helmet back upon the table. In spite of the hatred for Dr. Kelton that lurked deep within his heart, he could not help but admire the work the man had done.

"Yesterday," Cass said, "an imbecile walked into this laboratory. With the aid of the sensator, your consciousness occupied his mind for five minutes. Then the man walked out, saner than he had ever been before."

The true scientist showed for a moment in Kelton's eyes.

"Mind over matter," he said. "The body is but putty to the habits of the mind. Had I occupied that man's brain for twenty-four hours, I believe his imbecility would have disappeared entirely."

Cass sprang to his feet. His manner was accusing.

"Then why didn't you?" he snapped.

Kelton's eyes narrowed again as if he had said something he had not intended to say. He made an impatient gesture with his hands.

"Because I have more important work to do!"

"You used him as you would a guinea-pig," said Cass. "But you gave him nothing in return. Only a few days possible respite from imbecility! Why?"

Kelton, too, got to his feet, his eyes blazing from behind the thick glasses. He would have been a big man if it were not for the chronic arthritis that twitched his legs.

"That," he said icily, "is my own business!"

BODY SNATCHER

BY RICHARD
O. LEWIS

"Proceed with your experiment, Doctor!" snapped Roger Cass. "But it's for the last time!"



Weird indeed was the thing that happened to Doctor Kelton when he transferred his mind to the youthful body of Roger Cass!

Roger Cass stood there staring across the table at the man. His own young, athletic body was a head taller than that of Kelton's. His hands clenched once as he stood there, then unclenched. He felt that he wanted to tear the man apart, limb from limb.

SIX months alone in the cabin with Kelton's sneering face and testy jibes had filled him with hate for the man, a loathing for him. . . .

Cass got a grip on himself. After all, he need not stay in the cabin another day. He could go now. Immediately. The work was done.

With the money Kelton would pay him—five thousand dollars—he could go back home, marry Madge. She would be waiting for him. He could set up a little electrical shop of his own.

He let his body relax. "I'm sorry we didn't get along better together," he told Kelton. He even permitted himself a smile. "But that's over now. The work is done. I shall go just as soon as you can make arrangements to pay me."

Kelton was still leaning across the table.

"I will pay you," he said slowly.

The cynical twist had returned to the lips beneath the dirty-gray mustache and something lay hidden behind the narrowed eyes.

"I will pay you. *After the experiments are completed!*"

Cass felt as if someone had dumped a pail of ice water over him. His teeth clenched tightly and his body stiffened with cold anger. He couldn't speak.

In the back of his mind was the memory of the contract he had signed with Kelton, the contract he had been eager to sign. He hadn't paid much attention to the clause that had read something like, "Payment to be made after the experiments are completed." It was boring into his brain now.

Kelton was speaking. "One successful experiment with the sensor* doesn't prove that it will continue to work satisfactorily time after time. One robin doesn't make a spring, you know. When I hired you, I expected you to realize that this was a man's job! Perhaps I misjudged you—"

There it was again! Kelton stabbing him with subtle thrusts of venom, prodding him to anger. It had been that way for over two months now. What was the man trying to do? Madden him to the point of quitting the job? Welsh on the five thousand dollars?

* While thought-transference machines are still a scientific dream, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that the process of thought, now believed by many to be electrical in nature, can be focused on a thought-receptor, such as the human brain.

Extensive experimentation has established the presence of brain-waves, but research along these lines is still far from complete. But if the brain does give off "waves" of energy, there is no reason not to suppose that it can also receive thought-impulses through electrical waves, instead of through the ears, or through the other four senses.

For example: If a person sitting behind another person in a movie theater wants to try an interesting experiment in brain-waves, he need only concentrate his attention on the head of the individual in front of him.

"You will turn around," he will think. "You will look at me." This is repeated *mentally* with monotonous regularity, until the subject starts to fidget in his chair, feels uncomfortable, finally does turn around with a look of annoyance.

Observe: This process is purely mental. Only brain-waves convey the message. Yet it is perfectly received (provided the subject is ordinarily intelligent and receptive) and the subject's reaction is the normal response to an order.

Therefore, since messages can be received *mentally*, why cannot thought actually be *transferred*? A radio broadcasting station sends out messages which are perfectly reproduced by a receiving instrument.

If that instrument should be a human brain, which acts independently of other agencies, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that a type of hypnosis can be effected which will blanket original thought, so that the *transmitted* thought-impulses, once received, can go on from that point and develop a *secondary* pattern of thought.

When this point has been reached, the subject is still an independent being, but he is using another person's consciousness to think with.—Ed.

Then Cass found that his mind was made up. He would drive Kelton out into the open, make him put his cards on the table.

"If further experimentation is necessary," he said pointedly, "then we must get out of here. We must go where there are people. Zany Luke is the only subject within miles of here. And you have already used him."

He wondered why Kelton had chosen this isolated spot in the first place. The closest town lay a few miles away over a dozen monotonous hills.

"If we could make one more experiment here," said Kelton. "One more experiment, I believe, would be sufficient." He looked from Cass to the two helmets upon the table. "Of course, it would take courage—"

So *that* was it! All this talk about courage! Hell, why didn't Kelton come out like a man and say so? If this broken down Kelton thought Roger Cass was afraid—

"Sure!" said Cass. "I'll go through the experiment with you, if that's what you want. But it's the last one! After that, you pay me off and I get out of here! Understand! I'm getting tired of this damned nonsense!"

CASS blew up completely. And that, (although Roger Cass didn't know it) was exactly what the crafty Kelton expected him to do.

MINUTES LATER, Cass was seated across the table from the doctor. A silvery helmet was on the head of each. Near the table, a bank of tubes in a control board were warming up. Two small wires led from the control board to the tiny switch in hands of the older man.

Kelton was trying to keep his face blank and expressionless. Like a poker player who had just been dealt a royal flush.

The younger man's cleanly cut face was glowing with anger. Afraid? Nuts!

And then, quite suddenly, Roger Cass *was* afraid!

A disquieting thought was gnawing at the back of his brain, struggling to make itself clear to him, trying to warn him—

But Cass couldn't quite catch the thought. The filaments and wires in the helmet were sending a buzzing vibration through his brain, confusing him.

It felt as if the singing wires were filling his brain with nothingness. No, that wasn't it. The vibration was sucking something out of his brain. Isolating it. Sucking it up into the helmet and sending it across a gulf of black nothingness.

And then the vibration was dying away. Slowly. . . .

Roger Cass found himself peering through thick glasses. He was looking across the table—at *himself!*

Strange thoughts ran through his head. Alice in Wonderland, looking through the mirror. A Scotch poet had said,

"To see ourselves as others see us."

But he wasn't looking at himself. He was merely looking at his own body. His own ego—his own conscious self—was now occupying *Kelton's* brain and body, and he was staring across the table through Kelton's eyes and thick glasses at the body that was once his own.

Kelton's conscious self was staring back at him from the young body, staring back through slitted eyes.

Then through Cass's consciousness came a startling thought that left him cold. Kelton had tricked him! *Kelton had stolen his body!* And he, Roger Cass, like the impetuous young fool he was had plunged headlong into the trap.

Everything became suddenly clear.

Everything fit together perfectly. He knew now why Kelton had selected the best athlete in college to assist him in his work, why he had insisted upon a thorough medical examination. He knew why he had selected this out-of-the-way cabin among the Ozark hills.

Kelton had not perfected the sensor as a means to aid sick minds. No! He had perfected it for a more selfish reason!

Kelton had wanted to get rid of his own arthritic shell.

Now he had stolen a body! Roger Cass's body!

Cass, in the shell that was now his own, leaped to his feet and swept the helmet from his head. A red haze of madness danced before the thick glasses that covered his eyes. The chair crashed over behind him as he started around the table.

THERE was but one thought in his mind now. He wanted to reach that body. His own body. He wanted to beat Kelton's consciousness out of it with his clenched fists!

The other man was coming to meet him, towering above him, smiling cynically.

Too late Cass remembered the shell of a body that was now his. The arthritic legs beneath him trembled.

Then a fist lashed out toward him. His own fist—directed by Kelton's consciousness. It exploded against his face, rocked his head back and sent the thick glasses spinning from his myopic eyes.

Half blind, he clutched at the shadowy arm, tried to hang on.

Again, the fist struck him. He went reeling backward to go sprawling over the chair. Sharp pain stabbed through his leg. He tried to get up, but fell back half unconscious.

He lay there looking up through hazy blindness at his own body that towered

above him. That was irony. The strength he had built into that body through intensive years of hard training and clean living was now being used against him!

But the body did not attack again. It stood there gloating over him.

"It might interest you to know," Kelton's consciousness said from above him, "that I placed my entire fortune in a trust fund for you six months ago. And now that I am you, the money will automatically become my own again."

A cold laugh came from the twisted lips.

"Now I have everything—money, youth, the sensor. And the sensor will remain my secret. When this body of yours grows old, I shall exchange it again for a younger one!"

A fanatical light danced in the eyes.

"I shall have perpetual youth! Throughout all the ages!"

Cass struggled to rise. But the old body that was now his trembled in beaten exhaustion, and the pain in his leg stabbed agony into his brain.

Through the dim eyes that were nearly useless without the thick glasses, he saw the shadow above him take a step closer. He saw the youthful face—his own face—twisted into a leering, horrible mask. He saw the flash of steel in the shadow's hand.

A knife! Kelton was going to kill him! Only in that way would the man be safe!

Cass found his voice. "You fool!" he shouted. "Stop it! You can't get away with this! You can't go through life with *murder* on your hands!"

"Zany Luke's knife," hissed Kelton. "I hid it yesterday when I occupied his body for those few minutes. Zany Luke, the half-wit. I was careful not to effect too great a cure upon his mind. His knife! I will be the only witness to the fact that the half-wit did the kill-

ing! Killed you—Dr. Kelton— because you tampered with his brain!”

The shadow came closer, hand raised, eyes blazing madness.

The nearness of death sent strength coursing through Cass. He rolled quickly aside from the path of the descending blade, tried to get to his feet.

BUT it was no use. He was too slow. The shadow was upon him again, knife raised—

Then came salvation!

To Cass, lying there helplessly upon the floor, it seemed that a miracle had taken place. Later, when he had more time to think, he knew that it was but a logical happening.

Zany Luke, his broad, drooping shoulders shutting out the light, was standing in the doorway. In one huge hand was a brace of squirrels that he had brought, as a present for the doctor who had helped his sick mind the day before.

Kelton wheeled quickly at the slight sound the mountaineer had made. There was a brief moment of indecision while he stood there with the knife in his hand.

That brief moment gave Zany Luke's plodding brain time enough to assimilate enough of the facts to reach a decision. He dropped the squirrels and came lumbering into the room.

“Heah, now,” he said. “Yuh cain't do thet!”

Then his eyes stared at the knife. He walked up to Kelton and held out his pawlike hand.

“Thet's mine,” he said—like an overgrown child who had lost a valued possession. “Give hit heah!”

“Look out!” It was Cass who shouted.

He had seen Kelton's new body grow suddenly tense, had seen the knife come back for a desperate plunge.

Cass lashed out with both feet toward Kelton's legs, felt the pain in his own leg become white hot.

Several things happened at once. Kelton staggered off balance. His descending arm thudded down hard over Luke's shoulder. The knife clattered to the floor. And Luke's ham of a fist came up in a crazy, powerful swing that sent both Kelton and the table behind him crashing to the floor.

Blackness was flooding in upon Roger Cass. He tried to fight it off. His leg was a torture, his shell of a body ached and blood was coming from somewhere at the back of his head.

He wanted to tell Luke something. He wanted to tell him to tie up Kelton, not to let him get away.

The mountaineer was helping him up.

“Luke! Listen! You've got to—got to—”

Then the blackness came with a silent rush to engulf his senses completely.

ROGER CASS opened his eyes. He was lying on a dirty cot in a smoke-blackened cabin. He tried to look around, but his eyes pained him and he closed them again.

“Heah's yuh specs.” It was Luke's voice. “I knowed yuh needed 'em so I toted 'em along when I fetched yuh heah.”

Cass put on the thick glasses. He could see better now. Luke was sitting on a box near the cot. But the cabin was not Luke's.

“Where's Kel—” Cass broke off quickly. He couldn't ask for Kelton. Luke wouldn't understand. “Where's the other man?”

“Yuh needn't be a'skert none o' him findin' yuh heah,” said Luke. “He's been huntin' yuh, but he don't know wheah this ol' trappin' cabin be.”

Luke's silly, beard-stubbed face split into a grin.

"Listen, Luke," said Cass. "You've got to stop him from getting away. You've got to go get him. Bring him here."

LUKE shook his head. "Cain't now. He's gone. Heerd his truck start up quite a spell back. Guess he didn't like that last shot I sent skitterin' over his haid—"

Cass had been trying to sit up. He sank back now with an audible groan.

Kelton, unable to kill him, had fled. *Kelton in his—Roger Cass's—body . . .*

"Laig hurt?" Luke wanted to know.

Cass nodded. There was no use trying to explain things to the half-wit. It would only confuse him.

"Tain't broke none," said Luke. "Jest twisted right smart."

As soon as he was able to walk, Cass thought, he would go after Kelton. He would trail him to the ends of the earth.

"Got a slippery-elm poultice on hit. Slippery-elm's good—"

And when he found him— Cass's hands clenched at his sides.

"—walk in two or t'ree days, meb-be—"

But what could he do if he found him? Turn him over to the police? No. He had no proof. He couldn't just go up and say,

"Here, this man has stolen my body." They would laugh at him. They would think he was crazy.

"—an' good ol' squirrel soup," said Luke.

Then a thought more terrifying than all the others crashed into Cass's brain.

Madge! Kelton would go to her. She would think it was Cass. *She would marry him!*

He swept the glasses from his eyes and, in spite of the feverish blackness that sought to claim him, swung his feet over the edge of the cot and sat up.

His head reeled and his eyes were

half blind as he struggled to his feet and stood there for a moment, swaying.

He would go after Kelton—now!

His trembling old legs buckled painfully at the first step forward. He went swirling down again into blackness.

CASS felt better when he awakened. He got slowly from the cot and stood up. Zany Luke watched him, a beatific expression upon his loutish face.

"Tol' yuh thet slippery-elm'd work," he said. "An' yuh slep' a long spell, too."

"Has he—has he come back?" Cass wanted to know. There was just a chance—

"Naw." Luke nodded toward the squirrel gun leaning against the log wall, and grinned. "He's plum' skert t' come back."

Cass hobbled slowly to the door and looked out. Low wooded hills stretched away into the distance as far as he could see. The sun was going down— No, it was coming up. He had slept longer than he had thought. It was morning.

Somewhere over those hills, was the nearest town. He had to get to it, had to warn Madge before Kelton reached her. But how? He couldn't walk. And, maybe even now, it was too late!

He tried to shake the thought from his mind, tried to think of a way out. He couldn't send the half-witted Luke. There would be long-distance telephone calls to make, telegrams. Luke would get all mixed up. Madge would think someone was trying to play a rude joke on her.

"Effen yuh could jest change yuhself back int' me like yuh did t' other day." Luke had come up behind Cass in the doorway. "Then yuh could walk int' town—"

ROGER CASS'S eyes popped open. That was it! And it took a half-

wit to think of it! If he could change bodies with Luke! Luke's hulking frame, hardened by years in the hills, would carry him untiringly!

Cass wheeled quickly. "I'm going back to the cabin," he told Luke. "You stay here. If Kel—I mean, if *he* comes back, get him. Don't shoot him. Just tie him up here and wait until I get back."

Luke grinned and nodded. Obviously, he was happy about the whole thing.

CASS had to stop innumerable times to rest his swollen and aching ankle. He was surprised at the strength that seemed to flow through the doctor's old body. Except for the ankle, the body was holding up remarkably well. And the arthritic pains had gone from the joints.

What was it Kelton had said? Mind over matter? The body was but putty to the habits of the mind? Something like that. Maybe . . . maybe his own consciousness was curing the ills of the body.

Far below him, he caught sight of the cabin. It looked as if it had been deserted for weeks. The truck was gone. The door was closed.

Well-grounded fears began to assail Cass as he approached the log structure. There was only one chance in a million that Kelton had left the sensor behind, only one chance in a million that Luke's playful shooting had frightened him away without it.

Kelton had probably loaded it into the truck *before* he had come hunting for Cass, before Luke's bullets had driven him back.

Cass stood before the door. So much depended upon what he would find there in the cabin! If the sensor wasn't there . . .

It seemed to Cass that he stood there a full minute with his hand upon the

latch before he could force himself to swing open the door.

Then he stopped short there in the doorway, every muscle in his body quivering and tense. He could hardly believe his eyes.

There, seated at a table with his head pillowed upon his arms, was—Kelton! His clothes were torn. His hair was rumpled and there was a dark splotch of blood upon one arm.

Kelton raised his head and turned quickly at the sound the door had made.

So that was it! Kelton had set a trap for him! He had driven away the truck, had come sneaking back to the cabin to wait . . .

Cass gripped the staff tighter in his hand. It would make a good club.

But Kelton did not spring at him. He just sat there staring blankly at the doorway, his face a mask of pain.

"Who—who are you?" he asked.

Cass went warily into the room.

"You know damned well who I am," he said. "And you know why I came back."

KELTON was blinking at him painfully.

"You—you have them with you?" he asked. "You—you brought them back?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Cass told him.

"My glasses!" Fear spread over the man's face. "If you have lost them—"

Cass sent his hand quickly to his eyes. The thick glasses were not there. Then he remembered having tucked them into his pocket before leaving Luke's cabin.

Why, that was strange! He could see very well without them, see as well as he ever could! He hadn't worn them at all on his long tramp through the woods.

Mind over matter again! His strong, young consciousness had forced the doctor's old eyes to see again! While

Kelton's consciousness had—

"My bad eyesight is a nervous affliction," said Kelton. "I could see all right for awhile through your eyes, then as I started away in the truck . . ." He blinked his eyes painfully again. "I couldn't see the road. I had a smash-up. Then I found my way back here."

"They're here in my shirt pocket." Cass was hardly conscious that he had spoken the words. He was too elated with the happy turn things had taken.

He remembered how he had been able to see things only in shadows, when the glasses had been knocked from his eyes, soon after he had exchanged bodies with Kelton. Now Kelton was seeing in shadows. Kelton would have to give him back his own body—in exchange for the glasses. And Madge—

He was so busy with his own thoughts that he did not see Kelton's myopic eyes narrow, did not see the man's legs tense beneath him as he sat there in the chair.

Everything was going to be all right, Cass thought—

Then Kelton sprang, a throaty roar of madness upon his lips.

The surprise was complete. Cass felt the club being wrenched from his hand and heard the pocket rip from his shirt, as he was hurled violently back against the log wall of the cabin.

Half-stunned, he saw Kelton bent over, saw him trying to pick up the glasses from where they had fallen upon the earthen floor. If Kelton got those glasses—

Cass leaped forward, tried to shove the man aside. His old fists rained puny blows upon the man's head. He kicked the glasses, saw them go tumbling away out of reach.

Then Kelton came up. His eyes were blazing murderously as he raised the club.

Cass knew that he was facing death again. Kelton could see him only as a

shadow. But that would be enough. Now that the glasses were somewhere in the cabin, Kelton would not hesitate to kill him.

And Zany Luke would not interfere this time. The half-wit had been told to wait back at the hidden cabin.

Cass leaped aside from the blind swing of the club, surprised at the agility of his old body. Kelton was looking for him. He had thrown the club away in his blind rage. He was going to use his fists.

CASS knew that his shell of a body, despite the new strength that seemed to be flowing through it, would be no match for the hard muscles of the young, athletic body he was pitted against.

He saw the glasses upon the floor. If he could get them, get out the door—

He made a quick dive for them.

But he was not quick enough. Kelton was upon him, clawing, driving him to the floor with his weight and strength.

Cass didn't know how it happened. It seemed to be merely automatic for him to do what he did. His arm hooked up over Kelton's elbow and he rolled suddenly to one side. The man went spinning away over the dirt floor.

A wrestling trick! That was it. Putty to the habits of the mind! His consciousness had been trained for several years in the science of wrestling! Now—

A grim smile was upon Roger Cass's lips as he got to his feet. Science against strength. This was to be a battle to the death.

No! He couldn't kill Kelton! *He couldn't ruin his own body!* But—

He sidestepped Kelton's mad plunge, tripped him as he went rushing by. But Kelton was on his feet again in an instant closing in again, lashing out with flying fists.

Cass felt his head rock back as a blow struck him high on the cheek, felt himself going down beneath the steady rain of fists. His senses were reeling. He tried to get away; but couldn't.

Then he saw his chance. And, once again, his body responded automatically.

Stooped over as he was, he clutched one of the flying fists as it sped harmlessly above him. He twisted his body into Kelton's, jerked Kelton off balance over his shoulders, shot an arm between the man's legs—and lifted with all the strength of his body.

With Kelton draped helplessly across his shoulders, Roger Cass began to spin. Round and round, faster and faster.

Cass hoped his transposed body could stand the strain. He closed his eyes, clenched his teeth against the pain that was crawling up his leg from his injured ankle.

He was getting dizzy. But he knew from experience that Kelton, his head flying through a much wider arc, was receiving at least four times the punishment. The man was screaming wildly. The walls of the cabin were spinning about him in a hazy, kaleidoscopic panorama.

The final culmination of the "flying mare" should have been a sudden relaxing of all holds that would permit the whirling body to go hurtling through the air, end over end.

But Cass didn't do that. He didn't want to run the risk of injuring that body irreparably—his own body. Instead, he stopped spinning, staggered a moment and let the man slide from his shoulders to the floor.

Kelton sat there, his body swaying, his head lolling from side to side like a drunken man. His face was pale and his eyes were out of focus. He looked as if he were about to get sick.

ROGER CASS tied the man's wrists and ankles tightly with strips of insulated wire. He picked up the thick glasses that were still unbroken.

"Here's your damned glasses," he panted as he tossed them toward Kelton. "I'll put them on you after awhile—after we've had another little experiment with the sensor!"

He stood looking down at the beaten man.

"Then, when I'm safely back in my own body again, I'll bring Luke here. Your consciousness is going into Luke's body for twenty-four hours. We'll give that crafty brain of yours some real work to do. We'll see if it can cure Luke's mental troubles.

"If so, we'll give the sensor to some institution where it will do humanity some good."

Cass leaned back for a moment against one of the tables. Now that things were all over, he became acutely conscious of his own weakness and fatigue. But soon he would have his own body—

"I'll take the five thousand dollars you owe me from the trust fund you so graciously put in my name," Roger Cass said presently. "Then I'll turn the rest of it back to you, except—"

A new light had come into his eyes. It was a pleasant, anticipatory light.

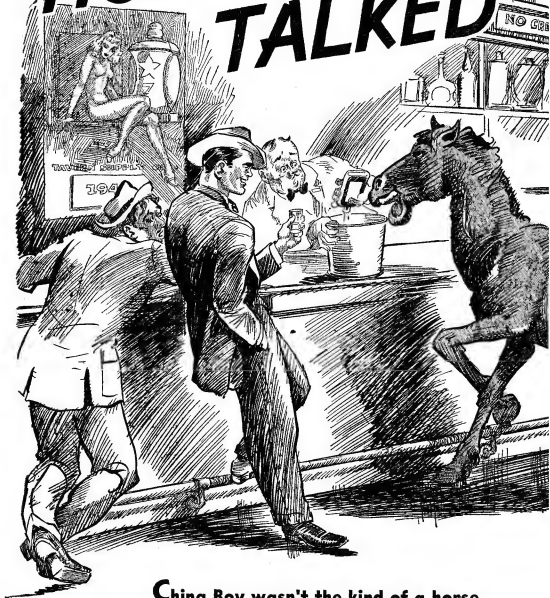
"—except for maybe another five thousand—as a wedding present from you to Madge!"

DID YOU KNOW?

The six continents of Earth were, according to geologists, once one single continent. They point to the fact that all the continents have shorelines that match to an amazing degree. They say

the original continent broke up and drifted apart when the world was young. If you like jigsaw puzzles, cut up an old map and fit the continents together. You'll be surprised at the results.

The **HORSE** That **TALKED**



China Boy wasn't the kind of a horse you meet every day. He could talk, and he could drink. And as it turned out, he could do both a good deal faster than he could run

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

PHILIP KIRK was not expecting to encounter the utterly fantastic. Instead, the young attorney was in a gloomily anticipatory frame of mind as he drove along the sunny country road, green with the freshness of spring.

"Why didn't I take up ditch digging instead of the law?" he muttered. "Then at least I wouldn't be helping out Walter Garvin's greasy schemes by serving foreclosure notice on some poor unlucky devil."

business he had been hired to carry out.

In his pocket was a crisp, folded paper. It was a bill of foreclosure. It informed in ponderous legal verbiage that Walter Garvin, Mortgagee, was soon to take legal possession of the farm of one F. Darrel, heir to E. Darrel, Deceased.

Walter Garvin was the financial tycoon of nearby Central City. Everybody hated him—behind his back. Even Philip Kirk hadn't been able to



"That was great!" said China Boy happily. "Set 'em up again, boy!"

Kirk looked more like a football player than a lawyer. He was a husky blond six-footer whose rugged face was creased in a frown of disgust at this

refuse when Garvin hired him to serve this foreclosure notice. Garvin could wreck a young attorney's career by just lifting his fat finger.

"I should have told him where to go with this job," Kirk growled again. "Now it's up to me to break the bad news to old Doctor Darrel's heir. Wouldn't blame him if he punched me in the jaw."

His shabby old coupé lurched and wheezed along the elm bordered road. It was a day of late April and the big trees were burgeoning pale green tips. Soon Kirk reached the Darrel farm.

The old farm had a sad, forlorn look about its weedy fields and unkempt fence rows. The house was a rambling, half-stone structure whose timber gables needed paint. The yard was full of briars, and the only sign of life was a sleek black horse dispiritedly cropping the grass by the driveway.

The animal looked like a race horse, not a farm horse. His sleek, coal-black body had the lines of speed. He raised his head and then ambled toward Philip Kirk as the young lawyer went up onto the porch with the crisp legal paper in his hand.

Kirk looked at the black horse, who returned his stare with an unusually intelligent eye. He wondered what a thoroughbred race horse was doing here. Then an amazing thing happened.

The black horse opened his jaws, and there came a deep bass voice.

"Hello, Mac," said the horse.

Kirk turned, startled. Then he grinned. For a moment, he had thought the horse was speaking to him—

"Do you happen to have a drink on you, pal?" the horse seemed to ask Kirk in that same deep voice. There was an insinuating expression in his eye.

Philip Kirk gaped wildly. There could be no doubt about it. The horse had spoken to *him!*

"How about it, pal?" the horse asked Kirk impatiently. "You got a flask on you?"

Kirk felt himself on the verge of mad-

ness. This horse in front of him couldn't really be talking. It must be—

"Ventriloquism!" Kirk exclaimed suddenly. "That's what it is—someone trying to make a fool of me!"

He breathed with relief. Then, his anger rising, he looked around for the ventriloquist.

"This is a hell of a practical joke," Kirk said wrathfully. He knocked furiously on the door.

A girl answered the knocks. She was small and dark and pretty, and she looked up in surprise at the big, angry young lawyer.

"Do you always receive callers with a display of your powers of ventriloquism?" Kirk asked her bitingly.

THE girl seemed bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"It was very clever," Kirk snapped. "You're as good as Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. But I'm not interested in ventriloquistic tricks. I'm looking for F. Darrel, the owner of this place."

The girl's brown eyes began to snap. "I'm Frances Darrel," she told Kirk. "And I haven't played any tricks on you."

"I suppose it wasn't you who made that horse seem to speak to me," Kirk scoffed, jerking a thumb toward the black race horse.

Frances' pretty face cleared. "Oh, I understand now," she exclaimed. "China Boy has been talking to you."

She turned severely toward the black horse, who had been standing beside the porch as an interested spectator of the scene.

"You promised me you wouldn't scare any more strangers by talking to them, Boy," she reminded sternly.

China Boy, the race horse, hung his head. "Aw, I just forgot," the animal said "I'm sorry, Frances."

Kirk's jaw sagged. He stared wildly at the horse.

"Do you mean that there's no ventriloquism about this—that horse can really *talk*?" he asked hoarsely.

"Of course I can talk," China Boy said with an air of injured pride. "What do you think I am, a dummy?"

Kirk felt as though he had wandered into a never-never world. The girl saw his utter bewilderment.

"It's not as strange as it seems, China Boy's talking," she told him earnestly. "It's the result of my father's last experiment. He was Doctor Erasmus Darrel, the eminent zoologist, as you may have known, and he believed that if an animal were able to talk, it could learn things quickly and become almost as intelligent as a human being. Father decided to try to prove his theory by making a horse able to talk. He bought China Boy for the purpose—he wanted a thoroughbred as the most intelligent specimen available.

"He conducted a series of surgical operations on China Boy, over a period of months," Frances continued. "I don't understand his whole process, though I've since read all his notes. Anyway, it involved complete surgical reconstruction of Boy's larynx, vocal cords and palates, by grafting and reshaping tissues and bone.

"Speech, you know, is produced by the vibrations of the vocal cords as altered by the tongue and lips. You can see what tremendous surgical work it required to make China Boy able to reproduce the sounds of human speech!

"And when father had achieved that, it took him more months before he could induce Boy to imitate his own speech, to repeat words after him and learn their meaning. Once he had learned a few words, though, Boy's progress was rapid. A horse is the most intelligent of animals, you know—

ability to speak and understand words made this one able to learn as fast as a growing child. Father was triumphant—he was planning to exhibit Boy as a great scientific achievement, when he died."

Frances Darrel's face clouded as she spoke of her father's death. And Kirk felt a quick sympathy.

"That was tough—dying just when he'd done such a great thing," the young lawyer commented. He could still scarcely believe his ears.

The girl nodded her dark head. "I was away from home and didn't know what father had been doing. When I returned, after being notified of his death, I found China Boy here, with Nick Jory, father's hired man. I was as surprised as you were just now, when I first heard Boy talking!"

"I'll bet you were," Kirk declared. He asked puzzledly, "But why did your father teach the horse such a slangy form of speech?"

"Father didn't teach him that slang—he learned it from Nick, our disreputable hired man," Frances explained. She looked severely at the horse as she added, "Nick taught him how to drink liquor, too, and I don't seem able to break him of the habit."

CHINA BOY hung his head guiltily. "Aw, Nick just gives me a little shot now and then," the horse mumbled. "I can take it or leave it alone."

It seemed queerer with each passing moment to hear the horse talking. But the fact that it was the result of a long scientific experiment somehow made the utterly fantastic fact less nightmarish.

"I remember a horse named China Boy that raced a year ago at Hunterdon Park," Kirk said slowly. "Is this the same horse?"

"That's me, pal!" cried the black racer. His eyes flashed proudly. "Say,

didn't I burn up the track that day? Those other plugs thought they were chasing a ghost, when I got started."

"Stop bragging, Boy," Frances Darrel told the horse severely. Then the girl smiled up at Kirk. "Now that I've explained about China Boy, perhaps you'll tell me why you called."

Kirk suddenly remembered, and his heart sank as he looked down at the folded paper in his hand—Garvin's bill of foreclosure.

"Oh, Lord—you are F. Darrel, the owner here!" he groaned.

"Why, yes, I told you that," Frances said. "What's the matter?"

Kirk hesitated. He liked this friendly, pretty girl a lot. The last thing he wanted to do was to tell her that she was going to be dispossessed of her family home.

He began stumbingly, "I'm Phil Kirk, acting as attorney for Mr. Walter Garvin, and he—"

That was as far as he got. Sparks flashed in Frances' expressive brown eyes, and her small form stiffened.

"Garvin? That fat swindler?" she exclaimed. "If I'd known you were one of his men, I'd have called Nick to throw you off the place!"

"Please listen!" Kirk begged miserably. "I'm just one of Garvin's attorneys, and I dislike him as much as you do. When he sent me out here with a bill of foreclosure, how was I to know that F. Darrel was the prettiest—well, how was I to know?" he pleaded.

"You can just leave and take your paper with you," Frances declared icily.

"But, listen—" Kirk protested.

Here China Boy entered the argument. "You heard what she said," the horse snapped to Kirk. "On your way, 'bo!"

"If you'll only listen!" Kirk repeated earnestly to the girl. "I'd like to help

you, if you'll let me. The foreclosure is set for a week from now—but maybe we can think of some way to get around it."

Frances regarded him hostilely. "Why should you want to help me when you're one of Walter Garvin's lawyers?"

Kirk blushed hotly. "Well, I sort of—er—like you, and I thought maybe I could do something to help you, and—"

"Shall I run him off the place?" China Boy asked.

The girl shook her head. "No-o," she said, looking doubtfully at Kirk. "He's not responsible for Walter Garvin's crookedness."

"Then you'll let me help you?" Kirk asked eagerly.

"There's nothing you can do," Frances said wearily. "The mortgage on this farm is eight thousand dollars. I haven't a hundred. Garvin will get the place—and cheat me out of a half million dollars."

"A half million?" Kirk stared. "What do you mean?"

Frances explained discouragedly. "There's a big deposit of molybdenite under this farm. That's the ore of molybdenum, the metal that's so valuable now for munitions: Walter Garvin found out about it, realized its value, and schemed to get his hands on it.

"He lent my father money—on a mortgage. Father needed the money to fit up his laboratory here and finance his experiments. Dad didn't know about the molybdenite—I only found out myself a few weeks ago when I returned home after his death. The deposit is worth hundreds of thousands—and will be Garvin's property when he forecloses."

KIRK swore. "The damned scoundrel! So that's why he's so anxious

to get this farm!" Then he exclaimed, "But surely you can get some big metals corporation to lend you eight thousand dollars on the strength of the valuable ore here?"

Frances shook her dark head in discouragement. "No, I thought of that, but there isn't time. You see, such a corporation demands test-borings, the analysis of ore samples, and so on, and all that takes time. And in another week, Garvin's mortgage is due."

"If I had the eight thousand, I'd give it to you in a minute!" Kirk declared. He added ruefully, "But I have just about fifty bucks."

"It's nice of you to want to help, anyway," Frances sighed. "I guess there's just nothing we can do about it."

"I'll be damned if I'm going to let that overstuffed crook swindle you out of your property and a fortune like that!" Kirk said angrily. "There must be some way we can raise eight thousand dollars this week!"

"You try it, as I have, and you'll find out how hard it is," Frances prosed sadly.

Kirk's eye fell upon China Boy. The black race horse had been listening anxiously to the conversation, standing beside the porch.

"Say, maybe China Boy could help us get the money!" Kirk cried.

The horse perked up alertly. But Frances shook her head.

"If you're thinking of putting Boy on the stage as a talking horse—it can't be done. I thought of that and called a couple of showmen who looked at Boy. They said it was wonderful he could talk, but that the public would think it was just ventriloquism, as you did at first. The show people are not interested."

She added resentfully, "Those stage producers who saw China Boy originated all those talking-horse jokes you

hear now. They actually took notes of his conversation. But they said he couldn't go on the stage."

"I'm not interested in putting Boy on the stage—it's the race track I'm thinking of!" Kirk said eagerly. "Tomorrow, over at Hunterdon Park track, they're running the Gold Stakes Handicap. The first-prize money is ten thousand dollars. More than enough to pay Garvin what you owe him—if China Boy could win that race!"

China Boy's intelligent eyes flashed, and the head of the black race horse jerked up in sharp interest.

"Me run a race again?" the animal cried eagerly. "Oh, boy—let me at it! That prize money is as good as in the bank right now!"

Frances looked doubtfully from the eager horse to Philip Kirk.

"Boy did have a fine track record when he was running," she admitted. "But he hasn't run a race for a year. He's out of training—"

"Say, I'm always in training!" China Boy avowed loudly. "I'll show those nags over at Hunterdon some real running. They'll have to short-cut across the diagonal to keep within sight of me!"

And, as though inspired, the black horse started away on a terrific run around the house. Hoofs thundering, mane flying in the wind, he came dashing back up to them, his eyes flashing.

"Did you see that form?" he cried. "Just wait till I get going at the Park. Every other horse there is gonna look like he's tied to a post!"

"What about it?" Kirk asked the girl eagerly. "It's a chance, at least, to beat out Garvin. Why don't you try it?"

"I would try it," Frances said sadly, "but I just can't. The entry fee for that race is four hundred dollars, isn't it? I haven't even fifty."

For a moment, Kirk was stumped. He hadn't thought of the entry fee. He didn't have four hundred dollars either, he admitted unhappily.

"But wait!" he told Frances suddenly. "Walter Garvin owes me four hundred in legal fees. I can collect that—we can use Garvin's own money to beat him!"

"I couldn't let you do that for me," Frances Darrel protested, her pretty face troubled.

"You can't very well stop me," Kirk grinned. "I'm on my way now. Soon as I fix things up, I'll come back and let you know, and help you get Boy out to the track tomorrow."

China Boy called loudly after Kirk as he entered his car.

"Tell them to wet down that track!" the horse shouted. "I don't want those other horses choking to death in my dust!"

CHAPTER II

Entry Fee

KIRK drove back across town and headed for the big race track in the western suburbs of Central City. He found Ralph Voss, secretary of the Hunterdon Park Association, in the track offices. Kirk talked rapidly.

Voss looked surprised. "It's a late hour to be entering a horse for the Gold Stakes, you know. However, it's within the rules."

"The horse is China Boy—owner, Miss Frances Darrel," Kirk explained. "Miss Darrel will send her check for the entry fee later today."

"The check will have to be in this office this evening or her horse will be scratched," Voss warned. Then he asked curiously, "How come you're getting into the racing game, Kirk? It's hardly suitable for a young attorney."

"This comes under the head of legal business," Kirk grinned, and left.

He drove back into town to the business district. Now to get the four hundred dollars that Walter Garvin owed him, and deposit it to Frances' credit, and then everything would be clear sailing—if China Boy won!

Doubts assailed Kirk. The talking horse must be badly out of training. Suppose he didn't win? But Kirk forced that thought aside. The horse simply *had* to win, to save Frances from being swindled!

Kirk realized there was no apparent reason why *he* should be worrying about that. No reason—except that he had gone completely overboard at first sight of Frances, that he wanted nothing more in the world than to help her, protect her, just look at her and be around her as long as she'd let him. And if he could start by helping her save her home, maybe she would—

He snapped out of his roseate speculations. He was approaching the skyscraper that housed Walter Garvin's offices. And presently Kirk was ushered through thick-carpeted offices into Garvin's inner sanctum.

Walter Garvin looked like a middle-aged cherub with indigestion. Plump was his body, and chubby was his face, and pinkly bald was his head. But there was nothing the least cherubic about the cold blue marbles of his eyes.

"Well, Kirk, did you serve that bill of foreclosure on the Darrel girl?" he demanded.

Kirk, dismayed, put his hand into his pocket where the crisp folded paper was. He'd forgotten all about it, in his excitement.

"I thought so!" snapped Walter Garvin. "You've thrown in with the Darrel girl—she's bought you out somehow. You've got a crazy notion you can help her save her property by winning a

horse race, eh?"

Kirk was thunderstruck. How in the name of a million devils could this cherubic little fiend have learned the truth so quickly?

Garvin smiled in satisfaction. "Wondering how I found out, eh? Well, Ralph Voss over at Hunterdon Park is indebted to me and anxious to please me. He knew you were one of my lawyers, and when you started dabbling in racing, he thought he'd better phone me about it. That's how I know you just entered the Darrel girl's horse in the Gold Stakes. Think if it wins first money, it'll clear off what she owes me, eh?"

Kirk's broad shoulders stiffened. "Well, what about it?" he demanded defiantly.

"What about it?" shrilled Garvin. "I hire you and you go over to the other side. What kind of legal ethics do you call that?"

"Don't talk to me about ethics, you cheap swindler!" Kirk flared. "I know how you planned to cheat Frances out of a fortune. It won't work!"

"Get out of here!" snapped Walter Garvin furiously.

"First—the four hundred dollars in fees you owe me," Kirk reminded him. "I'll take that with me."

Garvin reached angrily for a check-book, then stopped. A cunning expression came onto his round face.

"You wouldn't be wanting that money for entry fee for the horse, would you?" he demanded. "Voss said you stalling about paying it."

Kirk's face gave him away. Garvin uttered a crow of triumph.

"I thought so!" the promoter exclaimed. He pushed away the check-book. "Well, Mr. Smart, you're not getting any money from me for that."

"You owe me—I can force you to pay!" Kirk declared angrily.

"Sure you can," gibed Garvin. "But it will take weeks for you to do it. And the Gold Stakes race is tomorrow."

"Why, you little shrimp!" Kirk cried. He advanced furiously.

GARVIN hastily pressed one of the buttons on his desk. Two men came quickly into the office—two large, hulking, ill-favored men.

"Shag and Murkel," Garvin told the enraged young lawyer, "specialize in little jobs for me, like throwing people out. So what are you going to do about it?"

The two big thugs stood waiting, eying Philip Kirk. And Kirk realized that starting a row here would net him exactly nothing.

"China Boy will run tomorrow, and he'll win!" Kirk said heatedly, as he turned to the door. "Your little scheme's not going to work, Garvin!"

"Come now, don't be a bad loser, Kirk," the promoter called mockingly after him as he slammed the door.

Kirk was in the depths of discouragement as he drove back out through the sunny afternoon countryside to the Darrel farm. He had told Frances that she could count on him for the entry fee—and now he'd let her down. From the bottom of his heart, he cursed Voss and Garvin.

He turned over wild schemes in his mind for procuring the four hundred dollars. None of them were practical. He was still stumped by the problem when he pulled his coupé in beside the old stone farmhouse.

Kirk heard voices out at the barn, and went out there. He found Frances with China Boy in the horse's big box-stall. The girl was berating a brick-faced, bleary-eyed man whom Kirk guessed was Nick Jory, the disreputable hired man.

Nick had an empty pint bottle in his

hand. And Kirk observed that there was a new glow in China Boy's eyes.

"Hello, pal!" the horse hailed Kirk loudly. He emitted a resounding hiccup, then cried, "Got everything set for me out at the track? I wish the race was sh-starting now. Boyoboyoboy—do I feel *swell!*"

Frances turned concernedly to the young lawyer.

"Nick has been giving Boy liquor again!" she told Kirk. "I caught him just now holding up that bottle for Boy to drink."

"Aw, I just gave him a half pint—that's just a drop to Boy," mumbled Nick Jory hoarsely. "He said he needed a little shot."

"Sure, jus' a li'l nip to make sure I get a good sleep tonight," China Boy added hastily. The horse looked as guilty as the hired man.

"Whoever heard of a race horse training on whiskey?" Frances stormed. She accused Nick bitterly. "It's all your fault, anyhow—you taught him to like the stuff, in the first place!"

Nick hung his head. "Well, it was sort of lonely for me here on the farm, without anybody to drink with," he defended lamely. "And Boy bein' able to talk and everything, I sort of got to think of him as a pal."

"Sure thing," chorused the horse. He hiccupped again. "Many's the night Nick an' I seen the sun come up—eh, Nick, ol' pal?"

"Well, you're not to have another drop," Frances declared. "Youve got to remember everything depends on your winning tomorrow."

Kirk knew it was time to make his unhappy disclosure.

"I'm afraid Boy isn't going to run tomorrow," he told the girl sorrowfully.

"Whazzat? Why not?" cried the horse, tossing his head erect.

Kirk explained, concluding, "And so

that dirty little sneak Garvin refused to pay the fees he owed me. No entry fee—no race."

Frances took it bravely. "You did the best you could," she consoled Kirk. Her chin quivered. "We just have to make the best of it."

"Isn't there any other way we can get that money?" Kirk asked desperately. "If we just had the four hundred—"

"I can get it," Nick Jory suggested helpfully. "I'll wrap a piece of lead pipe in a newspaper, and wait behind a dark corner till some prosperous-lookin' guy comes along, and—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Frances told the bibulous hired man severely. The girl turned to Kirk, her pretty face suddenly hopeful. "I've thought of something, Mr. Kirk."

"Please call me Phil," Kirk interrupted. "All my friends do," he explained hurriedly, and then blushed.

Frances smiled a little wanly. "Right you are, Phil. And of course I'm Frances."

SHE grew serious again. "As I was saying, we have a rich neighbor out here, a Mr. Wellington Doop, who saw China Boy and admired him, and wanted to buy him from me once. He doesn't know Boy can talk, of course."

"But if you sell Boy to this fellow Doop, we won't have him to run in the race tomorrow!" Kirk objected.

"You wouldn't sell me to that little wart Doop?" China Boy cried out miserably. "If I belonged to him, I'd never want to run again!"

"I'm not talking of selling you, Boy, so be quiet," Frances told the horse. She explained to Kirk, "Maybe Doop would lend us four hundred dollars on China Boy. That would give us the entry fee."

Kirk's hopes kindled. "It's an idea,

Frances. Telephone this Doop fellow and ask him to come right over."

Frances turned toward the house. When she returned, she said,

"Mr. Doop said he'd drive over." Then, to China Boy, "Remember, Mr. Doop doesn't know you can talk, and you're not to say a word. I don't want him scared away."

"I'll be quiet as a mouse," the black horse promised loudly.

Wellington Doop's expensive blue sedan came purring into the driveway a scant quarter hour later. Doop advanced toward them. He was a prissy, withered-looking little man with a brisk manner, pince-nez eyeglasses, and the general appearance of a well-dressed sparrow.

"Well, well, Miss Darrel—so you finally decided to sell China Boy to me?" he greeted Frances.

He looked at the silent black horse who was staring back at him dejectedly.

"Well, I'll pay you a good price. Need a nice thoroughbred to make my place seem more country-estastish looking. Sort of an ornament. Expensive ornament—but I can afford it. Ha! Ha!"

"Me—an ornament?" groaned China Boy. Kirk promptly silenced the horse by grabbing his head. He pretended to be caressing the steed.

"Who said that?" Doop asked, startled, looking quickly around.

"It was me coughing, Mister," put in Nick Jory hoarsely.

Frances explained hopefully to the sparrow-like little man,

"The fact is, Mr. Doop, that I don't want to sell China Boy. But I would like to borrow four hundred dollars on him so I can enter him in the race tomorrow."

"You want me to lend you the money on him?" Wellington Doop repeated. His face fell; he shook his head. "No,

no—couldn't do that. I'm prepared to buy the horse—pay you a fair price for him. But lend—no."

"But he's worth more than that, so your money's safe," Frances said earnestly. "And if he wins tomorrow, we can repay you at once."

"Ha! If he wins!" sniffed Mr. Doop. "But how can you expect him to win? Suppose he fell and broke a leg in the race. Your race and my security are lost together. And I wouldn't be surprised if just that happened. He's a nice-looking horse, but he looks pretty old for racing."

Doop's crafty assumed depreciation of China Boy had quick results. The wrath of the race horse could no longer be restrained by Kirk.

"Me getting old?" China Boy growled at the little financier. "Why, you're crazy! I'm just a three-year-old—it's in the books for anybody to see!"

Wellington Doop's jaw sagged, and his pale eyes bulged as he heard the steed address him. He looked wildly from the horse to the others.

"Why—what—this is witchcraft!" he stammered. "That horse is *talking*—"

"I'll say I'm talking, and I've plenty to tell you!" cried China Boy. "Say I'm getting old, will you?" He curled back his lips from his teeth and thrust his grinning face toward Doop. "Look at those teeth, if you don't believe me. Look at 'em!"

"My everlasting soul!" gasped Doop. "I wouldn't have believed this if I hadn't heard it! A horse talking!"

"I forgot to tell you he could talk," Frances said lamely. "It was an experiment of my father's—remarkable achievement."

"Re-remarkable!" stuttered Wellington Doop weakly.

"As a matter of fact," China Boy continued, an equine sneer curling his

lips, "if anybody around here's getting old, you are, Doop. That gray hair of yours shows you're no colt, fellow."

"Boy, don't insult Mr. Doop," Frances broke in hastily. "Please pay no attention to him, Mr. Doop."

WELLINGTON DOOP seemed a little dazed. "I think I'd better go home," he said falteringly. "I—I I don't seem to be feeling so well."

Kirk was fairly seething. "You clown, you've ruined everything," he whispered fiercely to the horse.

Whereupon China Boy changed his tactics. He approached the shrinking Mr. Doop and favored him with what he thought was a winning smile.

"Now, Mr. Doop, let's not be hasty," China Boy said brightly. "After all, this is a business proposition. You lend four hundred on me, and you'll get it back tomorrow night—with interest. I'm a cinch to win that race. Look at my legs—they'll carry me past every nag on that track so fast, they'll think I'm a bird. Anyway," he added, "a horse-fly."

Doop stared fascinatedly at the steed. He had never talked business with a horse before, and he found it somewhat disconcerting.

"But if you lost the race—" he faltered.

"I can't lose, I tell you," China Boy repeated firmly. The horse's eyes flashed ominously. "Looks like you don't think much of me, the way you talk. Looks like it's me that's being insulted, now."

Nick Jory whispered hoarsely to the shrinking Doop,

"Be careful, Mister—last time China Boy thought he was insulted, he nearly kicked a man to death."

China Boy's ears were flattening, and he was pawing the earth as he stared hard at Doop.

"If I thought you meant to insult me by saying that I'm not good security for a mere four hundred—"

Wellington Doop seemed panic-stricken. "No, I didn't say that!" he exclaimed thoroughly frightened. He fumbled hastily for his checkbook. "In fact, I'm only too glad to make the loan on you. You said four hundred, even?"

With shaking fingers, the little financier wrote the check and handed it to Frances.

"That's a real pal!" China Boy declared loudly. "Doop, you'll never regret this. How about sticking around and watching me work out?"

"If you don't mind," stuttered Wellington Doop, "I won't stay for that. I think I'll go home and take a bromide. Please excuse me."

Kirk and Frances watched the little man totter to his car. The blue sedan shot jerkily out to the road and departed like a rocket.

China Boy uttered a neighing chuckle. "We sure gave him the business!" crowed the horse. "Good work, Nick!"

"You two ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" reproved Frances. "You broke your promise, Boy. From now on, you're not to say a word, no matter what happens—understand?"

"Aw, all right," grumbled the horse. "But I had to get that entry fee somehow."

Kirk told Frances eagerly, "You'd better mail that check to your bank at once for deposit, and send Nick with your own check for the entry fee to Hunterdon Park."

Nick was soon on his way in Frances' car. China Boy, inordinately pleased with his business acumen, returned to his stall.

"It's all over but the shouting now," the horse called after Frances and Kirk

as they went toward the house. "Our troubles are over."

"I hope so," Kirk muttered anxiously to the girl. "Maybe he can talk the racing stewards into awarding him the race."

CHAPTER III

A Little Blackmail

TWILIGHT had come. Kirk lingered on the porch of the old house. He hated to leave Frances, and he thought of an excuse for staying.

"Why can't I stay here tonight and help you and Nick get Boy to the track tomorrow?" he asked. He added hastily, "Nick would be here to chaperon us, of course."

Frances giggled. "I'm afraid Nick isn't a very conventional chaperon. But I guess it would be all right. Nick is so undependable that I may need your help in the morning."

"Then that's settled," Kirk exclaimed delightedly.

He helped the girl prepare dinner in the kitchen of the old house. They talked until late. Nick Jory had not returned.

"He's probably in some beer joint," Frances sighed. "He has a genius for getting liquor without money. I don't know how he does it."

"I'll go out and make sure Boy is all right before I turn in," Kirk told her.

He found China Boy sleeping noisily in his dark stall. The horse was snoring, and talking in his sleep.

"—two lengths ahead—crazy jockey—" Kirk heard the horse muttering. He left the barn without awakening him.

Two hours later, Kirk awoke in the guest room of the old house. He sat up sleepily, wondering what had aroused him. It was midnight, dark and still

outside. Then he heard the sound of hoofs on gravel.

Kirk hastily donned his clothes and sprang to the window. He saw a big truck with a closed body parked in front of the house, its motor humming softly. And two men were leading China Boy up a board runway into the back of the truck.

"Why, somebody's *stealing* Boy!" Kirk gasped. He dashed down the stairs and burst out into the drive.

The truck was already rolling away, its gears grinding. Kirk yelled and ran after it, got hold of the cab door and swung himself up.

There were two big, hulking men in that cab. By the dashlight glow, he recognized them as Shag and Murkel, Walter Garvin's two thugs.

"Look out, Shag!" yelled the driver. "Get him!"

Kirk struck furiously, trying to reach the brake. He got his hand on it—then a wrench descended, glancing off his head, and he knew nothing more.

When he returned to consciousness, he felt himself rolling from side to side. His head was splitting. He opened his eyes.

He found himself sprawled back in the body of the truck. China Boy was on his feet, his halter tied to the side. The horse was looking anxiously at Kirk, but said nothing.

Opposite Kirk sat the man Shag, a black automatic balanced on his knee with its muzzle trained on the young lawyer's heart.

"Just take it easy, Mister, and you won't get hurt," leered the thug. "You're going on a little ride."

"So Garvin's stooped to murder, has he?" Kirk hissed.

Shag guffawed. "You ain't going to be murdered. We're just gonna keep you and this nag in a safe place till tomorrow's race is over."

Kirk felt stunned, mentally as well as physically. How had Garvin learned that they had been able to pay the entry fee? Then he realized that Voss, the race-track secretary, must have told the fat promoter. And Garvin, determined that China Boy was not going to win that purse, was seeing to it that the horse never even ran.

Kirk felt desperate. If he'd kept watch in the barn, as he should have done, this wouldn't have happened. It was his fault that Frances' slender hope of saving her home was gone. He must do something!

THE truck, he saw, was now rolling through the eastern section of Central City. This was a shabby river-front district whose streets were dark except for a few red neon beer signs that beamed cheerily through the gloom to the belated wanderer. Few people were abroad, at this late hour.

"If you're thinking of yellin' for help, forget it," Shag advised him. "I'll plug you if you make a peep."

"Keep your eye on him, Shag," Murkel called back from the cab.

"I'll take care of you boys for this," said Kirk slowly.

"Aw, don't make me laugh," retorted the big thug with the gun.

Kirk nerved himself for a leap at the other. It was the only chance he had. But it would be a miracle if he got past that pistol.

Then Kirk caught China Boy's eye. The horse was winking at him, with deliberate meaning. The young attorney delayed his lunge, wondering. Then he thought he understood the horse's plan. He tensed, waiting.

China Boy suddenly spoke, for the first time. The horse said loudly to Shag,

"Say, buddy, how about loosening this halter?"

Shag turned. He stared at the horse, his eyes popping in terror.

Instantly, Kirk sprang. He knocked the thug over and wrenched the gun from him. It fell to the floor and the two men scrambled around in a furious struggle.

"Give it to him!" the horse shouted encouragement to Kirk. "Knock his ears off!"

Murkel, the driver, had looked back startled as the fight began. Hearing China Boy shouting, the driver froze, his eyes bulging. With a crash, the truck collided with a telegraph pole and stopped, hard.

"Give him your left, pal!" China Boy was yelling to Kirk.

With a strangled cry of terror, Murkel tumbled out of the cab and fled into the night.

The man Kirk was fighting seemed frenzied by equal panic. He wanted not to struggle but to escape. He finally wrenched free from Kirk's grip, dived out of the truck, and flew down the street moaning.

Kirk, panting hard, picked up the fallen pistol. But the two thugs were out of sight. He returned to the truck.

"Good work, Boy!" he told the horse. "If you hadn't distracted his attention by speaking, I'd never have got past his gun."

"It was nothing," China Boy replied jauntily. "I'd have spoken up before, only I'd promised Frances I wouldn't no matter what happened. And anyway, I thought those men had come to take me to the race track."

The truck was wrecked, its radiator smashed against the pole. Kirk untied the black horse and led him out of the van.

"I'll have to telephone Frances to come with my car and the farm trailer, to take you home," he told the steed. "There ought to be a phone in that drug

store down the street."

China Boy, his sleek form frisking a little as he looked along the street, sniffed the wind from a neon-lighted saloon a block away. The black horse started sauntering in that direction.

"No, you don't!" Kirk cried, grabbing Boy's halter-ropes. "You may smell liquor but you're not going to get any."

"I only want one little drink," China Boy begged plaintively. "This kidnaping has been hard on my nerves."

"Not a drop," Kirk said fiercely. "You'll wait right here while I telephone."

To make sure of that, he tied the horse to the pole. Then he hurried to the drug store and soon was explaining to Frances on the phone.

"I'll come right away with the trailer!" the girl said anxiously. "Nick's back—he can hitch up the trailer for me. But Phil, you might have been hurt!"

Kirk glowed at the solicitude in her tone. He felt it repaid him for all he had gone through.

Walking on air, he returned to where China Boy was tied. A pedestrian—a mild-looking man—was just coming along the street, staring wonderingly at the tied horse.

WHEN the pedestrian came abreast of him, China Boy stuck out his head and spoke suddenly in his loud bass voice.

"How about buying me a little drink, Mister?" asked the horse insinuatingly.

The pedestrian goggled, then uttered a strangled shriek and fled along the dark street.

Kirk ran up. "What did you do that for?" he cried furiously. "Do you want to gather a crowd?"

"Either you buy me a drink," China Boy said determinedly, "or I'll pan-

handle everybody that comes along."

Kirk felt stymied. It would take some time for Frances to get here with the trailer. And if China Boy kept speaking to passersby, there would soon be a riot. The horse was in a mood to make trouble.

"All right," Kirk groaned. "I guess one drink won't hurt you. But you only get it on condition you keep quiet, understand?"

"Sure," agreed China Boy instantly.

Kirk untied the horse, and started with him toward the beaconing red sign of the nearby saloon. China Boy moved in a prancing canter of eager expectation, his hoofs clattering gaily on the sidewalk.

CHAPTER IV

A Big Night

MAN and horse pushed together through the old-fashioned swinging door of the saloon. It was a dimly lit room with a few dusty tables and a scarred bar over which drooped a shabby gentleman in an advanced stage of befuddlement, arguing with the bartender.

The barkeep was a big, heavy-faced individual with blinking, near-sighted eyes and an habitually suspicious look. He came along the bar as Kirk and China Boy stepped up to it. The horse had an expectant gleam in his eye.

"One Scotch for me and a pint of the same for the horse," Kirk ordered in a casual tone. "Put the pint in a bucket."

The bartender stared. No one had ever ordered a drink for a horse here before, and it took him some time to adjust himself to the situation. He finally spoke.

"You get that nag out of here, Mister," he said. "We don't serve horses."

"Why not?" demanded Kirk. "He's a customer, and you're required by law to serve all customers."

"But he's a horse, not a man," the bartender objected. "The law never expected us to run a saloon for horses."

"The law," Kirk assured him professionally, "says only that 'no public eating or drinking place shall refuse any orderly customer.' The horse is orderly and he is a customer. He wants a drink. If you refuse him, I can sue you as his guardian, since he's under age. Get that?"

The bartender stared, blinking. Then he turned slowly toward his array of bottles. He felt that there was a flaw somewhere in Kirk's argument, but he couldn't find it. It would be better, he thought, to serve the horse than to run afoul of the law.

China Boy spoke up loudly. "Rye, not Scotch!" the horse told the bartender.

The barman turned and stared very hard at the horse. China Boy was getting impatient.

"I said rye, not Scotch," he repeated loudly.

The bartender's slow wits considered this phenomenon. Then he looked at Kirk suspiciously.

"How come that horse can talk?" he asked.

Kirk, inwardly furious, shrugged. "He's a smart horse."

"I never seen no horse before that could talk," muttered the man.

"It's something new," Kirk assured him. He could have pole-axed China Boy for breaking his pledged silence.

The bartender slowly poured a pint of rye into a bucket and dubiously set it on the bar. China Boy dipped his velvet nose into the bucket. There was a loud *sloop*. The horse raised his head and snorted.

"That was something like it!" he

cried. "Set 'em up again!"

"You've had enough," Kirk snapped. "First thing, you'll be passing out. And don't think I'm going to drag you home."

"Me pass out?" cried China Boy. "Don't be foolish. I could run the mile right now in record time. I wish I was back at Belmont Park now—I'd show the yokels something!"

The shabby gentleman at the end of the bar had been listening gravely to China Boy for these last minutes. The gentleman had reached that state of well-being in which all events seem happily a part of the ordained scheme of things. To hear a horse talking did not surprise him, in his present state. It would not have surprised him to hear a lamp-post conversing.

Now this individual, a seedy, owlsh-looking man in horn-rimmed glasses, maneuvered with great deliberation along the bar toward the horse.

"How about having a drink on me?" Horn-Rims politely invited the steed.

"Don't mind if I do," China Boy replied affably. "Rye, barkeep!"

"You've had enough, I tell you!" Kirk insisted. He grabbed the horse's halter and tried to drag him away from the bar. "Come on along!"

"Don't bother me like that!" China Boy said irritably. "Give me this drink and I'll go. But if you don't, I'll kick this place to splinters."

THE bartender was alarmed. He told Kirk ominously,

"Listen, Mister, if that horse can't hold his liquor, you'll have to get him out of here."

"He'll be all right—we'll go in a minute," Kirk promised desperately. "Give him the drink."

The second pint of rye was poured into the bucket, and China Boy quaffed in unison with Horn-Rims, while Kirk

watched with gloomy foreboding.

"Haven't I seen you before?" Horn-Rims asked the horse. "You mentioned Belmont—wasn't you in a race out there last year?"

"Was I in a race?" cried China Boy. The horse made a bass sound indicative of light amusement. "Why, there wasn't any race to it when I got started!"

His eyes flashed. "There we were at the barrier, with me crouched to go. The bell sounds—we break—and then we're thundering around the first turn. I take the lead and hold it—they're breaking their hearts trying to catch me—we come around into the stretch—the crowd is yelling 'China Boy! China Boy!'"

"And you won?" Kirk cried, a little carried away in spite of himself.

China Boy made a shrugging movement. "Well, I didn't exactly win, but I cinched fourth place."

"China Boy?" repeated Horn-Rims. His eyes narrowed. "I *thought* I knew you. You're the dog I laid twenty bucks on, that threw the race."

"Threw the race?" China Boy cried. His eyes flashed anger. "You're crazy! I didn't throw that race—I was tripped, or I'd have been an easy first."

Horn-Rims sneered incredulously at the horse's assertion.

"Don't give me that stuff," he scoffed. "You delib-er-ate-ly pulled up in the home stretch. You and your jockey were fixed."

China Boy's ears flattened back along his head in pure rage. For a moment, the horse was speechless. Then he uttered a furious shout.

"Call me crooked, will you?" he cried to the horn-rimmed man. "Why, I'll tramp you right into the floor, you—"

Things happened then so fast that Kirk could not keep track of them. China Boy reared and made a lightning

plunge at Horn-Rims, with the obvious intention of trampling that gentleman into a mess.

But Horn-Rims, awake to the peril of those flashing hoofs, darted behind the bar. China Boy, balked, turned and started demolishing the mahogany bar with his rear hoofs. The bartender was by now at the door, yelling lustily out into the night for the police.

Kirk grabbed the mane of the furious race horse.

"Come away from here!" the young lawyer cried.

"Nobody can say I threw a race!" China Boy shouted. "I'll kill that bum!"

His hoofs were playing a devil's tattoo on the bar, and its mahogany veneer was splintering in all directions. Horn-Rims had dived from sight behind the counter. Kirk tugged vainly at the halter-rope.

Then suddenly two blue-coated men were on the scene. Stout minions of the law had appeared in a radio car, and one grabbed Philip Kirk's arm while the other seized the halter of the enraged horse.

"That's the one that started it, officer!" shouted the bartender, pointing to Kirk. "Him and that horse!"

"Drunk *and* disorderly, eh?" grated the officer who held Kirk's arm. "Come along, Mac—Magistrate Gumm will be glad to see you. O'Connor, you'd better fetch along that horse."

China Boy, wrenched away from his attempt to demolish the bar, turned a coldly angry eye on the red-faced cop who had seized his halter.

"Who you think you're pushing around, Copper?" the horse snapped.

O'Connor nearly dropped the halter. "Omigod, Cass, the **beast** talks!"

OFFICER CASS, who held Kirk's arm, was himself astounded for a

moment. Then he recovered his poise.

"Aw, this guy here is just doing some ventriloquizing. It's him talking, not the horse. Charlie McCarthy stuff."

"It sure sounded like it came from the horse," O'Connor declared, staring dubiously into China Boy's rolling, wicked eyes.

"Of course it was me talking!" snapped China Boy. "And you better watch how you treat me, or I'll report you to the Humane Society."

Officer Cass gave Kirk a vicious shove.

"Shut up that ventriloquizing, you!" he ordered Kirk. "Bring that plug along, O'Connor."

"Plug!" cried China Boy. "You call me that? There's no man living can call me that and—"

"For heaven's sake, shut up, Boy!" Kirk implored desperately. "They think I'm doing it by ventriloquism, as everyone always thinks at first when they hear you talk. And they'll take it out on me!"

China Boy subsided. And Kirk turned to the officers in desperate appeal.

"Listen, can't you let us off this time? I'll pay for the damage to the bar. That horse is going to race tomorrow, and ought to be home."

"This horse run?" cried O'Connor. "Why, from the breath of the beast, I'm thinking it's only the Whisky Stakes he'll ever be running!"

"Come along, and no more talk," Cass ordered Kirk. "Magistrate Gumm will know how to treat a smart-aleck like you."

With sinking heart, Kirk entered the radio car. China Boy's rope was tied to the back of the car and it cruised slowly through the dark streets, with the race horse trotting disconsolately behind.

When they reached the city building

where night court was in session to deliver summary justice on all and sundry, an unforeseen difficulty arose. China Boy insisted on entering the courtroom with the officers and Kirk.

"I won't never desert you, old pal!" the horse cried in thick tones to Kirk. "You and me will stick together to the end."

And with maudlin alcoholic sentimentality, the horse laid his head on Kirk's shoulder, at the same time emitting a resounding burp.

"Will you stop that ventriloquist stuff?" O'Connor demanded of Kirk. "It makes my flesh creep, to hear that beast seeming to talk."

"Hold the horse here," Officer Cass told his partner. "I'll take this fellow in."

Cass pushed Kirk ahead of him into the night court. It was a gloomy, lighted hall in which a few curious loungers were the only audience. Magistrate Gumm, a smug, plump, sarcastic little man, sat behind the desk, looking bored and vacuous.

The plump judge rose in astonishment to his feet. For as Kirk approached the desk with his captor, there was a thunder of hoofs on flooring and China Boy galloped into the court, dragging O'Connor with him.

"I told you I'd never desert you, pal!" the horse cried to Kirk.

"Here, here, what's this?" Judge Gumm demanded in his cynical voice. "What did that horse say? Or, more likely, was that you?"

Then the strangeness of it penetrated the smug magistrate's mind, and he stared.

"Ye Gods—*was* that horse talking?"

"No, Your Honor," said Officer Cass stoutly. "It's this here prisoner—he's one of those ventriloquists, and he took that horse into Regan's Bar and caused a disturbance, and also resisted an of-

ficer, and he has been making the horse seem to say things to insult us."

"Ah, I see!" Magistrate Gumm declared. "A show-off, eh? A fellow who thinks it's funny to use his ventriloquial talents to insult the law?"

The judge looked down at Philip Kirk almost caressingly.

"I like to meet your kind, prisoner," he told Kirk. "I like to show 'em that the law's something they can't get funny with. Their wisecracks don't do 'em much good when they hear 'Ninety days!' Ha! Ha!"

The ghoulish laughter of the cynical magistrate at his own jest was a gruesome thing to hear. Kirk made a desperate appeal.

"Your Honor, I'm Philip Kirk, attorney-at-law—"

"Then you'll need all your legal wisdom to get yourself out of this!" retorted Magistrate Gumm. "Eh, Cass?"

CASS diplomatically laughed loudly.

And Kirk, who had hopes of escaping this fix, also pretended amusement.

"That's a good one on me, your Honor," Kirk declared somewhat weakly.

Gumm looked at him with a slightly less ferocious eye. The judge fancied himself as a great wit and raconteur, and appreciation was always welcome.

"Proceed, Attorney Kirk," he said in less menacing tones. "Perhaps there is some excuse for your outrageous behavior. Personally, I doubt it."

"There is, your Honor," Kirk said with desperate hope. "You see—"

At this moment, China Boy interrupted. The horse had been standing, staring up at the judge and listening to the exchange. His befogged mind was now tired of it all. And he spoke thickly to Kirk.

"Aw, tell that fat monkey up on the bench to go take a running jump in the

lake," China Boy advised Kirk loudly.

Everyone in court held his breath. Magistrate Gumm turned blue, then ran rapidly through the spectrum to purple and crimson.

"*You!*" the magistrate roared at Kirk. "Just what did you say?"

"It wasn't me—it was the horse said it!" Kirk cried almost hysterically.

"The horse, indeed!" stormed the incredulous judge. "So you think you can use your smart ventriloquist tricks to make fun of me, eh?"

"What do you think you can do about it, Fatso?" demanded China Boy beligerently.

"For heaven's sake, Boy, shut up!" Kirk pleaded frantically.

It was too late. Magistrate Gumm had reached the exploding point. He had to clutch the desk for support. When he finally spoke, his voice was a strangled croak.

"Take—take him away!" he told the officers, pointing an unsteady finger at Kirk. "Lock him up!"

"What sentence, Judge?" asked Officer Cass, grabbing Kirk's arm.

"I'll tell you later," panted the crimson magistrate. "It'll take me some time to look up and find out the heaviest sentence I can give him!"

"But your Honor—" Kirk pleaded, sweating.

"Aw, don't speak to that tub of lard," China Boy said loudly. "He can't do that to us. *We* got our rights!"

"Take that horse out of here!" Gumm screamed to O'Connor. "Tie him up in the police garage! I'll send him to the glue factory!"

Philip Kirk was escorted to a cell and locked therein. The young lawyer sat down on the hard cot, his head in his hands.

Everything was such a mess to Kirk that he was completely bewildered. It seemed that fate was determined that

Frances had to lose everything, one way or another, and to Walter Garvin at that.

"If that damned horse had only had sense enough to lay off the liquor and keep quiet, just this one night!" Kirk cried in anguish.

An hour passed, and then a turnkey appeared.

"You're free, fellow," he told Kirk. "Your fine's been paid."

"My fine?" Kirk said amazedly.

The turnkey nodded. "Plenty big one—three hundred dollars! Old Gumm would rather have kept you locked up. But when the fine was paid, he had to order your release."

Wonderingly, Kirk left the building. Frances Darrel was waiting for him outside, and she had a box-trailer attached to his car in which China Boy now stood. The girl's pretty face lit up at sight of him.

"You're all right, Phil?" she cried. "When I reached town and heard about what happened, I came right over here to night court. I had to pay your fine to get you out?"

"But where did you get three hundred dollars?" Kirk exclaimed in an amazed voice.

"I gave the magistrate a check," Frances admitted. "He didn't want to take it, but I talked him into it. Dad, you see, had been his physician and he couldn't very well refuse."

"Good grief!" Kirk exclaimed, appalled. "You've given out *two* checks on the same four hundred—one to the race track for entry fee, and now one to the court. The court's check will bounce back tomorrow and you'll be in jail with me!"

"No, not if China Boy wins tomorrow!" Frances said eagerly. "Ten thousand prize money will be enough to pay Garvin's eight thousand, Doop's four hundred, and make good the fine."

"OH, Lord, the longer this goes on, the deeper we get into it!" Kirk cried. "How can China Boy win tomorrow when he's been boozing and rioting around tonight? Look at him!"

China Boy's head hung out over the trailer bars. The horse's eyes had a glazed look and thick, strange sounds came from him.

"Let-a me a-call you shwee-eet-heart—"

"He's dead drunk—trying to sing," Kirk said miserably. "Frances, unless we can sober him up before the race tomorrow, everything's lost before we've even started."

CHAPTER V

The Payoff

BAND music blared through the afternoon sunshine at Hunterdon Park. Pennants whipped in the breeze, and a chattering crowd was streaming into the grandstand and clustering around the pari-mutuel windows. There was that atmosphere of excitement and gaiety that always precedes a big race.

But there was no gaiety in Philip Kirk's heart as he hastened toward the race-track stables, clutching a large bottle. Disaster loomed close ahead. He had tried to help Frances Darrel save her inheritance—and now it looked as though his meddling would only cause her to lose her horse also, and her liberty as well.

He hurried through the stables to the owners' stalls. In one of these, Frances and Nick Jory were bending anxiously over China Boy.

The steed was a sorry sight. He lay, his eyes glazed, his head smothered in ice-packs. The horse had a tremendous hangover.

"Is he feeling any better?" Kirk asked anxiously as he entered.

Frances shook her head. "I don't think so. He still says his head is coming apart."

China Boy spoke in a feeble whisper, without raising his head.

"Go away and let me die in peace," he groaned. "I'm a very sick horse."

"You're a lazy horse, that's all!" Kirk snapped. "You're going to get up and run in that race, hangover or no hangover!"

"Me run?" moaned China Boy. "If your head hurt like mine does, you wouldn't feel like running no races."

"I know how you feel, Boy," said Nick Jory, in tearful sympathy.

"I'll say you do—you've got a hangover yourself," Kirk said bitterly. "If you'd come home last night, instead of carousing around—"

Frances interrupted. "Did you get the aspirin?" she asked Kirk.

He held out the big bottle. "Fifty tablets," he said. "That ought to be enough to help."

"Open your mouth, Boy," the girl commanded. The horse feebly complied, and they shoveled the aspirin tablets into him, and then held the water-bucket for him to drink.

"Feel any better now?" Kirk asked hopefully.

"No," China Boy groaned. "I feel like my head's coming off at the neck."

The horse added with haggard hope, "There's only one thing that can fix me up—a hair of the dog that bit me. Give me just one little drink, and—"

"No!" Kirk declared angrily. "Haven't you had enough liquor? You'll be able at least to run the race, now. But if you had any liquor in you, you couldn't get past the barrier."

He seized the horse's mane and pulled him brutally to his feet. China Boy stood there wobbling. He turned reproachful eyes on Kirk.

"You don't know what you're asking

of me," he groaned. "But I'll run—I'll run even though it kills me."

Frances tried strategy. "I'm ashamed of you, Boy!" she declared. "You told me you could beat any horse here. And now you're afraid to run against them."

"Afraid?" cried the horse with feeble resentment. "Why, even feeling the way I do, I could beat those other nags!"

"Then do it!" Frances encouraged. "If you don't, I'll know that all your stories about what a great racer you are were just boasting."

"I'll show you!" China Boy cried. "It may kill me, but I'll win that race for you. Here, Nick—get my saddle on."

"Good work, Frances!" whispered Kirk hopefully. "I think he's really got a good chance now. He should be able to win, on the record. If he stays mad, he'll put his heart into it, and—"

KIRK stopped, and stiffened. From farther in the stables, a loud voice had reached his ears.

"Where's this Miss Frances Darrel's outfit?" the voice was demanding.

"Down the line," someone was answering. "But it's almost race-time—she won't want to bother with visitors now."

"She'll bother with *me!*" declared Loud Voice. "She's going down to city court and explain about a certain bum check. And there's a Kirk fellow I'm looking for, too—"

"Oh, Lord—the police!" Kirk cried. He seized the girl's hand. "Quick, we've got to get out of here! Nick, take care of China Boy—we'll slip back when the coast is clear."

He and Frances darted out of the building just in time to escape being discovered by two approaching, flat-footed men in civilian clothes. Kirk ran with the girl toward the concealment of the nearby grandstand, from behind a cor-

ner of which they watched the stables.

Time passed, and the two detectives did not emerge. They were apparently searching the stables thoroughly. Kirk waited, the girl's fingers crushed in his own, watching tensely.

A bell rang. "Oh, it's almost post-time!" Frances cried. "Can't we go back?"

"Wait till the detectives leave—there they go now!" Kirk exclaimed. "Come on!"

The detectives had moved on toward the crowd at the rail. Kirk and Frances started toward the stables. A familiar voice halted Kirk.

"Think your horse will win, Miss Darrel?" it asked mockingly.

Kirk spun, and his fists clenched. It was fat, cherubic-faced Walter Garvin who stood there, immaculate in gray tweeds, grinning at them.

"What do you want?" Kirk demanded, scowling.

"Nothing—nothing at all," grinned the fat promoter. "I just came to see the race. I've an idea it will be an amusing one."

Garvin strolled away. "He'll tell the detectives where to find us!" Frances exclaimed.

"He's been up to something, the devil," Kirk muttered. "But no matter, now—we've got to get China Boy ready. If anything goes wrong now, we're sunk—in ten different ways."

When they reentered the stall, Kirk was at first overjoyed at the change in China Boy. The fire of life had come back into the black horse's eyes. He was prancing before the admiring gaze of Nick Jory, stepping daintily, his glossy tail proudly lifted.

"Why, he looks fine now!" Frances exclaimed eagerly.

"I feel fine, too!" cried China Boy. "Bring on those other hay burners! Let me at 'em! I'll show you all some

running today!"

The breath of the horse hit Kirk. It was so violently alcoholic that his head reeled. A horrible realization came to him.

"He's drunk again!" Kirk cried. He seized Nick Jory by the neck. "You fool, why did you give Boy more liquor?"

"I didn't—I swear I didn't!" gasped Nick, startled. "He didn't have a thing to drink except out of the water bucket—he said those aspirins was choking him."

Kirk, with a sudden idea, grabbed the bucket. Only a trace of liquid remained in it. He dipped his finger and tasted. The liquid was almost pure bourbon.

"Who filled this bucket?" he yelled at Nick.

"Why, a fellow who said you sent him here to help me," Nick replied, astounded. "A big, ugly-looking guy."

"One of Walter Garvin's thugs!" groaned Kirk. He swore under his breath. "Garvin was up to something, all right. He must have learned from the newspaper accounts of last night's mess that China Boy liked liquor, so he got the horse drunk to keep him from winning."

"Me drunk?" cried China Boy gaily. "Perish the thought! I'm in swell shape—sa-ay, I'll make two new track records out there today!"

AND as the horse pranced eagerly he emitted a resounding yodel.

"What are we going to do, Phil?" Frances cried. "He *can't* win, drunk like this—he won't last halfway around the track."

"Maybe he can stagger in somehow," Kirk said helplessly. "We may as well run him now—though it's a million to one chance."

"Here comes your jockey," warned Nick from the door of the stall.

Kirk seized China Boy by the mane. "Now, listen!" he said fiercely. "You go out and do your darnedest, and don't say a word from now on. And remember, if you lose the race, you belong to Wellington Doop!"

"Never fear, I can't lose," China Boy reassured him. "Oh, boy, will I show them all something! *Hic!* I can hardly wait!"

The jockey entered. He was a thin, pinched-faced little fellow who sized up his mount with a professional eye.

As the jockey appraised China Boy, the horse returned his gaze with drunken gravity. The jockey turned, surprise on his features.

"Say, is this goat stewed or something?" he demanded in his high, squeaky voice. "He's got a breath like a distillery!"

"That's just from a bottle that got broke here in the stall," Kirk said hastily. "The horse is all right, I hope!" he added fervently.

China Boy nodded vigorously. The jockey looked more startled.

"Never saw a horse act like this one," he muttered. "Well, I'll do my best." He mounted the horse, as the "To the Post" bugle sounded.

"Give him his head all the way," Kirk told the jockey earnestly. "He knows how to run his race."

China Boy turned his head back, and nodded confirmingly to the jockey again. He also winked, to add emphasis to the nod.

The jockey looked frustrated. "I never seen no horse act like this before," he squeaked, bewildered.

"That's just his temperament," Kirk groaned. "Well, good luck, son. You'll need it," he added under his breath as China Boy pranced gaily away.

Kirk and Frances, keeping a watchful eye for the snooping detectives, managed to gain a place at the rail

where they were well hidden by the excited crowd pressing to watch the Gold Stakes classic.

"Say, look at that third dog!" cried a man beside Kirk. "He must be crazy!"

"Oh, Phil—look!" Frances exclaimed despairingly.

Kirk's heart sank. Out there in the parade of horses sauntering sedately to the barrier, China Boy was putting on a weird spectacle.

He was simply expressing his high spirits by the unique procedure of walking backward to the barrier! He kept in line, and moved with the others—but tail forward, with prancing backward steps.

A low babble of amazement went up from the dense crowd. Nobody had ever seen a race horse act like this before. Many rubbed their eyes. The jockey astride China Boy seemed bewildered. Judges craned their necks.

And, when the horses reached the barrier, China Boy entered his slot docilely, but rear-foremost. He backed through it, turned, and then backed into it. A roar of laughter went up from the crowd. It seemed to inspire the exhilarated China Boy to further feats.

For, despite the frantic efforts of his jockey to restrain him, China Boy pranced forward out of the barrier, and did a neat little dance-step to the music of the band. The music stopped—and China Boy bowed gracefully to the crowd, returned to his place in the barrier, and negligently crossed his front legs in a waiting attitude.

There was a dead silence in the crowd. People stared at the barrier in blank amazement. Many wondered if they had actually seen what they must have seen.

"I'm—goin' home," mumbled a red-faced individual near Kirk, pushing his way out. "Knew I shouldn't have taken"

that last highball—”

“Darn that horse! Why does he have to show off to the crowd?” Kirk whispered fiercely.

“He’s not responsible, in his condition,” Frances said forlornly. “Oh, Phil, it’s hopeless—I don’t want to see it—”

Clang! The bell coincided with the springing of the tape. Ten horses sprang forward—one of them leaping to the front in a tremendous jump.

“It’s China Boy, ahead!” Kirk cried, with a little flare of hope. “He—”

“He’s down!” Frances sobbed.

IT was not quite true. China Boy did not actually go down. But in his alcoholic exuberance he had made too big a leap, and had a hard time keeping his feet. The other horses streaked past him as he staggered the rest of the field, drumming down the track.

Gamely China Boy hit his stride again and swept after the pack. He was only a length or two in the rear. But as they rounded the first quarter, it was obvious that China Boy had shot his bolt in that first crazy leap. He could not gain an inch on the horse next ahead of him, and Stardust and the other leaders were streaming out ahead.

“Well, *that’s* over,” Kirk muttered leadenly. “I guess we might as well hunt up those detectives and get it over with. Damn Garvin for that trick!”

Frances was sobbing. “He’s still trying—if he hadn’t had that whiskey, he might have won.”

China Boy was obviously making tremendous efforts as they came down the back-stretch, but was getting nowhere. He was still trailing, and his wind was going as the liquor took its toll. As the string of horses thundered around the three-quarters into the home stretch, it was obvious that China Boy was falling still farther behind.

“Stardust! Stardust!” the crowd was

yelling as the favorite led the flashing string of horses down the stretch.

“Phil—look!” cried Frances. “Look what’s happening!”

The horse in front of China Boy had inexplicably pulled up, for a moment. China Boy had flashed past him.

The next horse in front of Boy did the same thing. It slowed down sharply, and though the jockey went furiously to his whip and got his mount going again, China Boy had passed him too in a staggering, drunken run.

“What in the world—” Kirk marveled.

The main pack was just in front of China Boy now, Stardust leading by a length. And suddenly the whole pack, including the leader, also slowed up and began to mill confusedly in the center of the track.

Jockeys frantically used their whips and voices on their steeds. There was a wild confusion on the track, dust rising in clouds. The crowd in the grandstand was yelling in bewildered excitement.

The horses, urged by their jockeys, surged forward again. But in their moment of hesitation, China Boy had staggered past them all. And now, a bare head in front, China Boy wobbled unsteadily across the finish line!

“China Boy wins!” Frances cried gleefully. She flung her arms around Kirk’s neck. “Phil, we’ve won! We don’t have to go to jail, and we can pay off Garvin and Doop, and—”

“There’s something crazy about that finish!” Kirk cried bewilderedly. “Look what’s going on out there!”

There was a wild turmoil out at the judges’ stand. Jockeys had jumped from their mounts and some were yelling wildly to the officials, while others were using their fists on each other. Race-track police jumped into the mêlée.

Kirk tugged Frances by the hand,

through the confusion toward the judges' stand. China Boy was standing nearby, breathing hard, while his jockey had dismounted and was gazing about as though badly dazed.

"I tell you, somebody yelled it!" shrieked the jockey of Stardust to the judges. "I was a cinch to win, till then!"

"It kept me from placing!" cried another jockey furiously. "I heard it too—a deep, loud voice right behind me!"

The jockey next to him raised a howl.

"I was right behind you and it wasn't me who did it!" he cried. "I'll break your neck if you say—"

"What the devil has happened?" Kirk exclaimed to the girl. "I knew there was something queer about that finish."

The judge was calling, "You—China Boy's jockey—come here!"

THE dazed jockey stumbled unsteadily up. He squeaked wildly.

"It wasn't me—I swear it wasn't!"

"No, it couldn't have been him," agreed Stardust's jockey. "It was a deep, strong voice—like Smithers'."

Smithers yelled in rage.

"I had nothing to do with it—"

"Wait a minute!" cried the judge. "We'll settle later just who did that. But thousands of people are waiting for the result of this race. China Boy was first across the line, and you've agreed that China Boy's jockey couldn't have done it, with his squeaky voice. So I'm declaring China Boy official winner, and we'll settle this other matter later."

"Thank heavens!" Frances breathed. "We get the prize money, Phil! But I still don't understand what—"

"Take the money and let's get out of here quick," Kirk told her.

They found their jockey waiting by China Boy. The jockey was looking in fascinated horror at the horse.

"What happened?" Kirk cried to him.

"I don't want to remember it," the jockey shuddered. "All I want to do is to forget it ever happened."

He stumbled dazedly away. Kirk took Boy's bridle and led him toward the stables. China Boy walked with unsteady legs, but in the eyes of the horse was an expression of triumph.

"Boy, what *did* happen at the finish?" Frances asked the horse when they were out of the crowd. "You didn't have a chance to win, till all those horses ahead of you started pulling up. What made them do it?"

"I used my head," the horse declared proudly. "I saw I was going to lose, though of course that was only because I had a hangover. So I decided I had to slow the others up a little. I yelled to the horses ahead of me."

"What did you yell?" Kirk demanded.

China Boy winked at him. "I just yelled, *Whoa!*"

Kirk gasped. "You slowed them all down that way? Well, I'll be—"

"I thought it was a bright idea, too," Boy declared proudly.

Kirk began to laugh. "What a race! I'll bet your jockey will never forget it as long as he lives!"

Frances said earnestly, "Phil, when we've paid off Garvin and developed the molybdenite deposits, we'll have lots of money, and I want to return this prize money then. I think it's only fair."

Kirk looked at her curiously. "We, Frances?"

The girl crimsoned. "I meant — I thought maybe you'd still be around, or something—"

"I'll always be around—or something," Kirk grinned, and stopped . . .

"Hurry up, hurry up," China Boy complained behind them. "I want to get back out home. Tonight, Nick and I are going to celebrate—and I mean celebrate!"

»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

THORNTON AYRE
THE GOLDEN AMAZON RETURNS

Author of

THIRTY-FOUR years ago there were strange lights in the sky over the Cumberland Hills, reflecting the waters of the Lake District. The world was hushed for a while—and Thornton Ayre was born. But don't pay any attention to the lights in the sky; the stars still come out anyway.

Which is another way of saying that I am a Cumbrian, which explains my mad passion for the English Lakes, a particularly powerful pipe, a love of fantastic things, and a hatred for company. Call me a hermit if you like, but I get more kick out of walking miles alone in drizzling rain than all your parties, conventions, and get-togethers.

Five feet nine in height and thin as a plank, unruly haired and lost without glasses, I've been called plenty of things in my time. Maybe you can guess what those things were from my photograph—

which is another thing I loathe having taken. I can't tame my hair, and I finish up looking like a cross between Adolf Hitler and James Maxton. For the former reason I changed my moustache to a long one instead of a tooth-brush.

Well, that's enough of me—too much probably. Now to say a word on this science fiction racket. It all started about three years ago when I was getting pretty fed up with poor returns from occasional articles and short straight yarns in England. You see, the trouble over here is they don't like anything sensational, or off the beaten track.

At least, they didn't *then!* But times are changed.

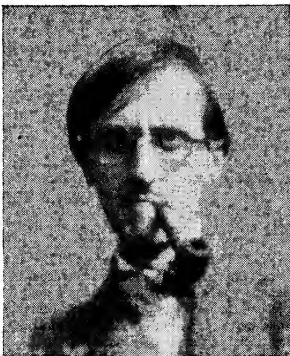
As I was saying, I was getting fed up when my closest friend, the redoubtable dynamo known as Fearn, slanted my ideas towards science fiction. I'd read several odd tons of the stuff and I must confess it had appealed to me quite a lot. I thought there was nothing to lose by having a shot at it—but oh! those first efforts were pretty awful. My brains, what there are of them, re-

volv'd around queer asteroids, men down in the sea, talking protoplasm, and other things usually associated with over-indulgence in opium or heavy cheese late at night.

About that time Stanley G. Weinbaum was at his peak. Everybody was nuts about his particular slant and so, being a trier, I imitated his style and produced *Jo*, the ammonia man, of the planet Jupiter. This was in the yarn *Penal World* published in 1937. Shortly afterwards I followed it up with a similar type of yarn called *Whispering Satellite*. On that point my activities terminated

because everybody was going like Weinbaum and the Editor was plenty sick.

I chewed things over. This science fiction business was getting a hold on me, and imitation would not do any longer. Why not try the other extreme and find out what had *not* been done? I felt I had got something there. Well, what *hadn't* been done? Mystery! I did that. Then—webwork. I did that. Finally, *The Golden Amazon*; and here she is again. But what next? I don't know—yet! But I'll think of something—between bombs!—Thornton Ayre, London.



Thornton Ayre

OSCAR'S COMING BACK!



You acclaimed "Oscar," the lovable little detective from Mars, in our October issue. You demanded his return. Here he is! Author James Norman has outdone himself on "Death Walks in Washington," wherein Oscar solves another fantastic riddle. Don't miss the little fellow's second adventure!

ALSO RETURNING— EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Do you remember Carson of Venus? He's the John Carter of the watery world, and the swashbuckling hero of many an adventure on our cloud-wrapped sister world. Burroughs has created another thrilling story of this very popular character, in "Captured on Venus," a complete short novel, first of a series of three novels for readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Take our advice and don't miss the first one! It's grand entertainment—the grandest in years!

fantastic
ADVENTURES

WATCH FOR THESE AND OTHER
GREAT STORIES IN THE BIG

March Issue

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS
JANUARY 20th!

Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you, and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine.

Count $3\frac{1}{2}$ points for each correct answer. If your score is between 80 and 100 you're better than Mr. Average Man. If you score between 50 and 80 you are Mr. Average Man. If your total is below 50, don't worry; the law of averages will catch up with you yet!

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Under certain conditions many substances have different values. In the column on the left you are asked to evaluate the difference between various extremes. If you're correct you should be able to link your answer with the only corresponding number in the right-hand column.

What's the difference between the:

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| (1) Equatorial and Polar radii (miles) | () 0 |
| (2) Atomic weight and atomic number of carbon | () 0.5 |
| (3) Zero and Absolute Zero on Centigrade Scale (degrees) | () 2 |
| (4) Boiling point at sea-level and $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles higher (degrees F.) | () 4 |
| (5) Sine of 60° and cosine of 30° | () 12 |
| (6) Boiling and freezing point on Fahrenheit Scale (degrees) | () 13 |
| (7) Mean solar day and sidereal day (minutes) | () 33 |
| (8) Speed of sound at 0° C. and 1° C. (feet/second) | () 50.47 |
| (9) Specific heat of water and ice | () 190 |
| (10) Average daily rising of the moon (minutes) | () 273 |

A MATTER OF CHOICE

- The most important factor affecting climate is: (a) distance of the sun, (b) volcanic action, (c) time of the year, (d) latitude.
- The most active gas in the air is: (a) oxygen, (b) nitrogen, (c) argon, (d) carbon.
- A medicine dropper works because of: (a) gravity, (b) air pressure, (c) centrifugal force, (d) tide action.
- The planet with the least mass is: (a) Mercury, (b) Mars, (c) Jupiter, (d) Neptune.
- The greatest distance to which water can be siphoned is: (a) 16 feet, (b) 32 feet, (c) 34 feet, (d) 65.5 feet.
- The most important force wearing away rocks is: (a) wind, (b) running water, (c) glaciers, (d) sunlight.

7. The first bubbles given off when water is heated are filled with: (a) oxygen, (b) carbon, (c) hydrogen, (d) steam.

8. The most important part of the digestive system is the: (a) stomach, (b) pancreas, (c) large intestines, (d) small intestines.

9. The only class of foods containing nitrogen is: (a) starches, (b) sugars, (c) fats, (d) proteins.

10. The stage of insects that causes the most damage to leaves is the: (a) egg, (b) larva, (c) pupa, (d) adult.

A CHEMISTRY "WHAT AM I"

Before you start you are given 5 points. If you can guess what element we are talking about with the first clue give yourself 5 points. If you don't know deduct 1 point and go on to the second clue. Don't look up the answer until you are sure you have properly identified the element.

- is used in paints, flashlight powders, and as powerful reducing agent in *thermit*.
- is not found free in nature. It is present in clay, mica and feldspar.
- is a good conductor of heat and electricity and one-third as heavy as iron.
- Its atomic weight is 27 and its valance is 3.
- Its chemical symbol is Al and its name is

POWER OF SUGGESTION

- Io is to Jupiter as Ariel is to
- is to temperature as barometer is to atmospheric pressure.
- 180° is to a triangle as is to a rectangle.
- 16 is to oxygen as 4 is to
- The sun is to the solar system as the is to the atom.
- The is to the brain as the backbone and ribs are to the abdominal organs.

SCIENTIFIC ADDITION

Here's something brand new in quizzes! Below are given several scientific facts which may be expressed by a number. Substitute numbers for the facts, add them all together, and if you're correct you'll get the value of the scientific expression as indicated.

Chromosomes in Man.

Valence of Calcium.

Pounds in a Kilogram.

Number of Satellites of Uranus.

Most Electrons in Third Ring of Atoms.

Percentage of Oxygen in Air by Volume.

Angle at which Ecliptic Cuts Celestial Equator.

Atomic Weight of Tin. (ans.)

(Answers on page 146)

Edgar Rice Burroughs RETURNS!

With his two most popular science fiction characters, John Carter of Virginia and Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium—

Remember *Princess of Mars*, *Gods of Mars*, and *War Lords of Mars*? Remember how you thrilled to these super stories by the one and only Edgar Rice Burroughs? Now, that world-famous master of science fiction continues the exciting adventures of John Carter and Dejah Thoris in a new, fascinating story! Don't fail to read *John Carter and the Giant of Mars* . . . one of the six great stories in the big January issue of **AMAZING STORIES!**

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- ★ **THE ARMAGEDDON OF JOHANN SCHMIDT**—by Arthur T. Harris. When the whole world cannot stop the sweep of a dictator, sometimes it remains to one great hero, and one trembling hand to hurl him to destruction . . .
- ★ **HAMMER OF THE GODS**—by John York Cabot. He had to have the God hammer! . . . even if he had to fight the tribal chief to get it. And fight he did, and won! But when he pried into the hammer's secret . . .
- ★ **SKIDMORE'S STRANGE EXPERIENCE**—by David Wright D'Brien. Professor Skidmore was conducting an experiment; sending his thoughts across the city. Then he found death facing him, and life depending on success!

BIG JANUARY ISSUE

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READER'S PAGE

PURE FANTASY

Sirs:

I've started reading your magazine lately and I think you've got the right idea—simply stick to pure fantasy, and it'll be O.K. with me.

In the April issue I liked three stories pretty well. Norman's "Blue Tropics" was a lot of fun, and I think he ought to go back there and pick up Trim. That story about Mr. Beem left me high and dry, but somehow, I liked it.

Lets have plenty of PURE fantasy.

Jane Ryan.

Plenty of fantasy in this issue, eh? We think you'll like it.—Ed.

AMATEUR MAGAZINE?

Sirs:

I have been reading Fantastic Adventures since it came out on the stands. I enjoy reading all the stories (or almost all) by your big name authors. I just finished the May 1940 Edition of Fantastic, and I enjoyed every story in it, especially "The Whispering Gorilla" by Don Wilcox. But here I must stop my praise. As I mentioned, I enjoyed stories by your big name authors. Many of us Science Fiction readers enjoy writing stories, and we would enjoy having them printed in one of your books, Fantastic or Amazing. But how can we compete with men like Binder, Polton Cross, or Don Wilcox?

A certain Science Fiction Magazine has a contest for amateurs. Even this is not enough. Why don't you start something? Publish a book with stories by no one but amateurs, and drawings by amateurs. I think all of us S.F. fans would enjoy a magazine like this. Why not put it up to your readers, and get their opinions on it? Here's to a new future in S.F.

Stanley Hirshfield,
1805 University Avenue,
Bronx, N. Y.

We're afraid your idea wouldn't work very well. You see, it isn't a matter of competition, it's a matter of ability. Binder, Cross, Wilcox, etc., are writers. They write for a living. Naturally they are better than people who are not writers. Would you suggest that the competition between bricklayers is so keen that a sign painter hasn't a chance to get a job laying bricks? He just isn't a bricklayer. So, an amateur magazine doesn't sound quite practical. However, there are several "fan" magazines. Maybe their editors will write to you.—Ed.

BOOK-LENGTH NOVELS

Sirs:

I am writing because after reading the Readers' Page in F.A. I feel it is my duty to give my opinion on several things. I have read every issue of F.A. and so far I have no kick coming. I think that six stories in each issue is a swell idea. I believe that Fantastic Adventures and her sister mag, Amazing Stories, are the tops.

I have just finished reading Eando Binder's "Five Steps to Tomorrow," a book-length novel, which, I believe, is the best I have ever read.

Of course, a book-length novel would be out of place in F.A. or Amazing, but wouldn't it be great if you had another sister mag featuring a book-length novel written by authors such as Binder, Wilcox, Repp, and Bond?

Everett Robertson,
1140 So. 10th St.,
Slaton, Texas.

We run book length novels in serial form. For instance, "The Hidden Universe," by Ralph Milne Farley, "Sons Of The Deluge," by Nelson S. Bond, "Black World," by A. R. Steber, "West Point, 3000 A. D.," by Manly Wade Wellman. And coming up in a Stanton A. Coblenz novel, a new one by Ed Earl Repp, etc.—Ed.

HUMOR

Sirs:

I have found something that is comparatively scarce in scientific fiction: humor. I would like to see more of this in Fantastic Adventures. I should not however want to see too much humor, as the novelty will wear off. A 50-50 mixture would be about right.

And a word about illustrations. The front cover on the August issue is swell. The interior decorations are good, but would like to see more Paul.

Something I haven't yet seen tried but which might be a good idea, is to put a back cover illustration depicting some scene in a future issue. Don't scratch it up with print; just the name of the story from which the scene is taken and the issue in which it will appear.

I would like a sequel or two, perhaps even a series of them like the "Adam Link" stories, or "War of Human Cats."

E. M. Monty,
7361 Rush,
Houston, Texas.

We have two humor yarns in this issue, and we (Continued on page 138)



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think they are good ones. But 50-50 would be a bit too much, don't you think? Adam Link appeared in December Amazing Stories, and he's coming back in February, both with full-length novelettes. Pragnell has two stories on our desk, continuations of his popular Martian series.—Ed.

RATINGS

Sirs:

Ratings for August: 1) "World Without Air" (Kuttner rarely misses). 2) "The Fertility of Dalrymple Todd" (Ditto Bond). 3) "Girl in The Whirlpool." 4) The Golden Princess." Nothing very new in the story, but it fits the cover—and is certainly far better than the "Dr. Destiny" affair turned out by Williams. 5) "War of Human Cats." Rather horrible, but well done. 6. "The Strange Voyage of Hector Squinch" and "The Ray That Failed" tied. There isn't much to choose between 4, 5, and 6.

Author Pragnell had, perhaps, better stay in New York. We raise sugar beets in Nebraska, and make them into sugar—carloads of it!

A good cover this time.

D. B. Thompson,
3136 Q St.,
Lincoln, Nebraska.

How do you like the cover on this issue? It's McCauley again, with his beautiful "Mac Girl" and some marvelous painting. We've got something there, we think.—Ed.

SOUTH AFRICA SPEAKS

Sirs:

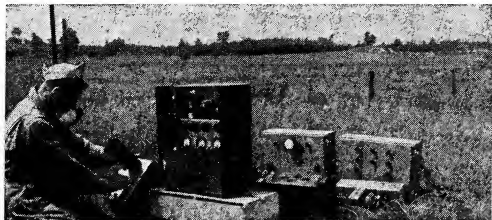
I have seen that you do not get many letters from South Africa, so I thought that I would drop you a line about F.A. and the opinion of the club that I have formed in Kimberley. I send you the opinions of all the members of the club, of which there are ten. Although it is now August, we have just finished the March issue; so, you will see, it will not be any good if we talk about the stories. Therefore, we give you our opinions of the magazine as a whole.

1) The Covers. Keep Paul (whom we admire) on the back. But give the other boys a chance on the front cover. We admire the work of Paul not only because of the stories they tell but also for the art in his pictures.

2) Enlarge the departments by adding a page in which readers may send in their own Fantastic Adventures.

3) The authors. Eando Binder must put a more fantastic tinge to his stories. F. A. Kummer writes well but some of his stories need more background to make them understandable. Phil Nowlan's stories need no correction. Ed Repp's stories are good but they also need more fantasy. Jimmy Norman sure uses his pen well. Nelson S. Bond's stories are up to standard. The others are O.K., up to standard. How about some new ones?

4) Now we come to our last piece of criticism,



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**RADIO
NEWS**

DECEMBER ISSUE—Now On Sale At All Newsstands!

which is: the stories. The authors must remember not to put too much Science Fiction in their stories; otherwise they are well handled. How about putting some more humor in the stories? We all enjoy a laugh.

That brings us to the end of our criticism. We all enjoy your stories. Now to give you a fact of the club. None of us are under 16, and all are over 15. This may be a shock to you but in South Africa we start young and do not stop until we are old. We are busy writing a Super Fantastic Tale, and we wonder if you will accept it if it is O.K.

The Ten Fantastic Boys.

G. Vorster, F. Jones, P. Jackson, J. Jackson, J. Johnson, J. Briggs, C. Thomas, P. Boggs, H. Mills, S. Stephens.

P.S. Our club has been in life for 3 years.

What is this, boys? A time travel letter? If none of you are under 16, it seems obvious you are all over 15. It is a shock to us. Are you all 15½ by any chance? If so, your club is unusual indeed, and we are proud to have ten such readers in far-off Africa.—Ed.

THE MAN FROM HELL

Sirs:

Enjoy your magazine very much, your illustrations are all very good. I like scientification but give us more weird stories. The best story I have read so far is "The Man From Hell." The stories like "F.O.B. Venus" and "The Madness of Lancelot Biggs" are very humorous. Keep up the good work.

John Merritt,
30 Burrell St.,
Roxbury, Mass.

A VERY GOOD FAN

Sirs:

I am a very good fan and have been reading your stories and following the pictures on the back cover. I thought that it would be a good idea for you to start a series of colored pictures of the planets and their moons, on the back of Fantastic Adventures.

A very good fan.

How about our back covers on Amazing Stories? They show, at present, Cities On Other Worlds.—Ed.

TRICERATOPS—AND OSCAR!

Sirs:

I believe that the great reptile on the cover of the October Fantastic Adventures is supposed to represent a Triceratops which appeared sometime in the Jurassic period during the Mesozoic era. It looks to me as if St. John got his reptiles mixed. The body of this one looks like that of the Tyrannosaurus and only the head looks like the Triceratops. The armor plate behind the head should be much larger and also the set of horns should be much longer.



The Siege of London

Since the Luftwaffe mission in the bombardment of England began August 8, what targets have the Nazi raiders actually hit? Why has Hermann Goering failed to gain control of the air? Just how powerful is the Royal Air Force? Did Hitler underestimate British aircraft production? How many pilots has England in reserve? These are just a few of the important questions of the all-out air war answered by FLYING and POPULAR AVIATION'S war correspondent, Leonard Engel. Don't miss this authoritative and exclusive article of the first aerial siege in history, beginning on page 10 of the big

DECEMBER ISSUE

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"Oscar of Mars" was magnificent! stupendous! gigantic! colossal! In other words it was a perfectly fantastic fantasy. Give us some more of him. Oh, yes, what happened to "Lancelot Biggs???"

W. Lewis,
Newcastle, Maine.

Maybe it was neither? After all, we haven't any actual remains of these animals, and reconstructions may be in error. And too, the animals in the story came from a rather different era than the extinct animals did. As for Oscar, he certainly went over with you readers. And as result, he's back again in the next issue, in company with Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Carson of Venus!—Ed.

FOUR TIMES A MONTH!

Sirs:

I was in the hospital last July, with nothing to do but read. I picked up a copy of Fantastic Adventures. Ever since that day I have been an ardent fan.

In the August issue the best story was "The Strange Voyage of Hector Squinch," the other stories were good, too. In the October issue "Jongor of Lost Land," "Oscar, Detective of Mars" and "Special Agent to Mars" were the best.

Since I've only read two issues, I'd like to read some of the back issues please. Let me know how I can get them and what the charges are.

Fantastic Adventures should be on the news-

stands four times a month.

George J. Quinn,
2324 Gr. Concourse,
Bronx, N. Y.

Back issues of all our magazines may be obtained from the circulation department at no advance in prices.—Ed.

UNUSUAL—EXCELLENT

Sirs:

The October cover is very unusual and very excellent. Feature this J. Allen St. John again.

Glad to see F.A. stress Fantasy rather than Scientific Fiction. The yarns are very entertaining, and not dry as in certain other magazines.

The letters in Fantastic on the cover are a bit altered. I prefer it the usual way.

The Editor's Notebook is a splendid feature. The cartoons are fine. Not enough illustration for "The Elixir of Invisibility." Always have a full page illustration.

Jongor of Lost Land is a truly fantastic adventure. A very exciting yarn. It was marvelous.

In the Correspondence Corner: where is "Tasmania?" Or is this a misprint? On the cover it says "Grim danger in a lost world." It wasn't a lost world, but a lost land.

Reader's Page was undersized. Is that all the good letters you received?

The account of Julian S. Krupa is swell. This is a fine feature to have. And you even have a

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picture—gee whiz!

Worst thing about F.A. is this: it's bi-monthly. Now F.A. is much too fine a magazine to wait two months for. Amazing Stories is monthly, how about F.A.?

Those short yarns in Fantastic are wonderful. "The Uncanny Power of Edwin Cobalt" was a nice little yarn. Unusual. "The Scientific Miller of Bowler U." was a swell sport fantasy.

The Science Fiction Nightmare on the Quiz Page is a nice idea.

I would like to see "Fantastic" on the cover in capital letters.

Harry Schmarje,
318 Stewart Rd.,
Muscatine, Iowa.

J. Allen St. John will be back in March with a cover scene from Carson Of Venus by Burroughs. And again—and again—and again. We have three marvelous paintings on hand right now by this popular artist. The change in the logo was to give more room for illustration, and to straighten it. But why capital letters? Tasmania is an island off the southeast coast of Australia. Lost world—lost land; aren't they the same? Or did you infer that we meant "planet" when we said "world?"—Ed.

ILLOGICAL

Sirs:

Why must you publish such illogical space war stories as "Special Agent to Venus?" It is utter rot to say that it would be difficult to pass a four thousand mile line of fortifications in the vastness of space. It is just like saying that because the roads are blocked in St. Louis it would be impossible to get from San Francisco to New York. Space as many of you authors fail to realize is THREE DIMENSIONAL. We are not a bunch of "Flatlanders" confined to the ecliptic. Also the planets do not stand still and I imagine it would be very difficult to keep the line in position. The only way a planet could be blockaded by space-forts, is if they form a sphere around the planet and revolve about it.

AMAZING is no better. In the space war story "Suicide Squadrons of Space" the author raves on and on about a certain "Space Station 10" without mentioning just where it is, beyond the fact that it is somewhere out in space. Apparently it was on some planet, as it had an atmosphere. No doubt the author did not know enough Astronomy to be more precise. And just what is the purpose of holding "Space Station 10" except to form a background for a rather hackneyed story? Do you think that any nation on Earth would attempt to hold one tiny island thousands of miles away, when the enemy is in command of the sea, and when the country itself is under blockade by the tremendously superior navy of the enemy. Armies never attempt to hold such long salients. The same applies to the story. No sane Nation would attempt to hold one tiny spot in the vast Solar System if all the rest was in control of the enemy.

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Fred Hurter, Jr.,
St. Andrew's College,
Aurora.

Well, maybe you're right. But if our hero had gone around the forts (which aren't so silly—if you consider that the French built just such a series of "impenetrable" defenses, now used by the Germans for a sideshow and museum), there would have been no story. About that station in space, what about the British holding Gibraltar, Singapore, etc.?—Ed.

WE STAND ACCUSED!

Sirs:

I'll tell you before I start this letter that it will be too long to print unless you cut it, and, s'help me, you'd better not do that.

The past two issues of FA were very good, but the October one . . .

The cover painting was quite good, but the cover itself was utterly ruined by having too much lettering. A real s-f fan would rather turn to the index than have the cover all cluttered up with a lot of names, and a non-fan wouldn't give a hang who wrote the stories, just as long as they were interesting.

The Editor's Notebook is just as good as ever. It is a combination fan-mag, article and editorial, all in one.

Of all the flea-bitten, moth-eaten plots, why did Williams have to pick one about a "lost world" in an "unexplored valley?!" That story has been written in other mags, books, even in "big-little" books and the funny papers. If an author can't think up his own plots, he'd better stop writing. The story was written okay, as far as that goes, but it doesn't go very far when you think of the age of the plot. I'm surprised at you for even considering such a story, let alone printing it in a mag like Fantastic. Get someone besides Williams as a feature author!!!

"Oscar, Detective of Mars" was good, but I would like to find out howinnabeck he could come from Mars via a magician's top hat!

I'd much rather have a short article or story in place of Fantastic Hoaxes.

The cartoons are swell. How about having a page or two of them?

"Special Agent to Venus" was one of the best ever written by Ayre. In other words, it was just fair.

Gardener's and Sandroff's stories were good, and silly, respectively.

Romance of the Elements could easily be dispensed with and never missed by me, as well as the Quiz Page.

"Elixir of Invisibility" ranks second to little Oscar, who stole the show.

"Paganini—Man or Devil?" was one of the best articles I have ever read. It was much more science-fictional than many of the articles printed today. More of this type, if possible.

Now I can really get down to some bad busi-

ness, and I do mean bad! I'm talking about my letter in the October issue. It was practically all honey and sugar. I say practically, because there were one or two lines that were probably displeasing to you, something about the back cover and the size, I believe. There was nothing horrid or unprintable in these lines, yet, what did you do? *You cut out these few lines so the whole Reader's Page would be nice and sweet!!!*

On the whole, you never print anything a reader writes that says anything that is really against you. Of course, you print letters that offer advice or suggest changes, but most of the letters printed are all for FA and all its stories and features. Take this issue, for example; was there one thing printed that said something against Fantastic? Not a bit. Of course there was Dr. Smith's letter, but this only disagreed with an article. There was also Alfred Maxwell's letter which offered some advice and asked a few questions.

Oh sure, I could write you a letter asking why you didn't print something besides sweet letters, and you would print it and point to it with pride as an example of an unsweet letter, as many other magazines have done, but that would be the end of it, you would go right on printing nice, sweet letters that would make anybody sick who really thought about it.

? ? ? ? ?

330 Spaulding Ave.,
Ripon, Wis.

Oscar himself don't know how he got in the hat, but the readers sure liked him. He's a cute little devil, isn't he? Say, if there was nothing horrid in your letter, how can you say we cut it out so that it would sound nice and sweet? What we cut out was an item that appeared in other letters, and if we reprinted it every month, more readers would get sick. And if you've read the letter before this one, you'll see another reader praises us for doing what you accuse us of not doing. This would seem to raise a bit of an argument. How about it, readers?—Ed.

THE VANISHING WITNESSES (Concluded from page 75)

"You booted Vachel down the stairs!" he exclaimed in amazement. "You pushed him down!"

"Certainly," she said gently. "I intended to all along. I was so afraid he'd shoot before I could do it."

He stared up at her in bafflement. "You meant to do it. But how . . . why . . . I don't understand . . . why did you double-cross poor Harrigan?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I was desperate," she said lowly. "There was no way I could get you out of that

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death trap. So I had to send someone else who would know something about the ray, and how to combat it. That was the only way I could do it. I had Vachel subject him to the ray and put him in with you. And thank God, he knew what to do. I only hope he didn't hate me too much for what I did to him."

"I don't think he did," said Boyle unsteadily. "He must have known, just as I did, that you couldn't really have been so bad . . ."

Boyle struggled to a sitting position, just as Montcliff came down the stairs, three at a time.

"C'est bien!" he exclaimed. "It is our triumph. Five prisoners and three dead men! And," he added, glancing eloquently at Vachel's unconscious body, "the master mind behind it all. I have taken the liberty of calling the police, Monsieur Boyle."

His brows came up as he noted the very proximate position of Patricia with Boyle.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, in wonder.

Patricia Velney looked at him wryly. "It came, all of a sudden," she explained, flushing. "I thought I didn't like him." She was helpless, looking at Boyle.

Boyle patted her hand, grinning expansively. "Wonders will never cease, of course. . . . Tricia, after this, I'm going to give you all the first hand murder, scandal and arson information you want."

She glowed with delight, mixed with puzzlement.

Boyle took that as a proper sign and added, "A man's wife should always be his confidante, shouldn't she?"

"Dick Boyle!" The glow of pleasure intensified, and her arms crept around his neck. Boyle kissed her, and over her shoulder winked at Montcliff.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Jim Laichos, Jr., 6021 Vernon Ave., Chicago, Ill., desires correspondents of either sex, ages 16 to 18, and will write concerning everything . . . Alfred Edward Maxwell, 545 E. Madison St., Opelousas, La., would like to hear from fantasy fans, and those interested in amateur science fiction writing and forming a scientification club . . . John Cunningham 2050 Gilbert St., Beaumont, Texas, would like pen pals of either sex around 17 to 19 years of age . . . Philip C. Bolander, 1401 Bay St., Alameda, Calif., wishes to hear from persons interested in science and joining a science organization . . . James Kritz, 717 Nichols St., Fulton, Mo., would like to hear from those interested in model building and aviation; either sex, all ages . . . Jean Hughes, 316 Washington Ave., Newport, Ky., would like pen pals from U. S. A. or foreign countries, either sex, any age, interested in collecting and trading match covers . . . Larry Jelf, 16, 680 Dickerson, Apt. 1, Detroit, Mich., desires correspondents from 14 to 18 years of age, in my country, interested in automotive body designing, reading and writing science fiction, saving astronomy articles and collecting stamps . . . Thomas Hoguet, 3671 Broadway, N. Y. C., has over 100 science fiction magazines for sale; send 3c stamp for price list . . . Darrel LeFever, Alamo, Texas, Box 888, has for disposal various magazines including 201 science fiction issues; also wishes to communicate with fans and collectors anywhere and will reply to all letters . . . Blaine R. Dunmire, 414 Washington Ave., Charleroi, Pa., would like to hear from anyone interested in discussing science fiction writing and illustrating, and will promptly answer all letters; also is interested in hearing from those who have miscellaneous magazines for sale . . . Stanley Goodman, 370 Second Ave., Long Branch, N. J., has for sale a variety of science fiction magazines in excellent condition, 10c each . . . Albert Mendelbaum, 1243 Junida St., N. S., Pittsburgh, Pa., has for sale in book form various Edgar Rice Burroughs stories, and will sell to highest bidders . . . Robert Stoker, Lagro, Ind., will buy or trade preancels for various magazines up to 1937 . . . Ray J. Sienkiewicz, 312 E. Elm St., Scranton, Pa., would like to communicate with readers of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in the Scranton vicinity who are interested in forming a scientification club; write, telephone, 2-2554, or call in person . . . Professor Chester Hoey, 301 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., will answer all problems free of charge . . . Richard Post, 4217 Homerlee Ave., East Chicago, Ind., would like pen pals around 14, especially interested in chemistry; also has science fiction magazines to exchange . . . Louie A. Mohrman, Wellington, Ohio, would like to hear from song writers, poets, and contest fans, and will answer all letters; also, exchange view cards, books and magazines and will send a surprise package to the first correspondent from

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(Concluded from page 145)

each state . . . Wm. Byron Myers, 556 Bradley St., Columbus, Ohio, 18 yrs., would like pen pals especially interested in exchanging stamps, radio and stamp collecting . . . Bob McDonald, Box 903, Litchfield, Minn., will send price lists to anyone desirous of back issues of science fiction magazines . . . Hugh F. Randolph, 205 Lawrence Ave., North Plainfield, N. J., has an almost complete collection of every science fiction magazine issued in 14 years and would prefer disposing of them to someone who can call for them . . . William F. Crisp, 124 S. Flower St., Los Angeles, Calif., wishes to hear from persons interested in discussing solutions regarding opening of the human mind to the gaze of the public in all its phases, functions and vibratory pulsations . . . Enos E. Jackson, Calle 12 92 LaTorre, Santiago De Cuba, will write long interesting letters about Cuba, send postal cards; etc., to all who write and are interested in stamp collecting . . . Max Belz, Waldoboro, Me., has back numbers of AMAZING STORIES from 1928 to date for sale, and will play chess via mail with any player in the U. S. A. or Canada; stakes or not, as desired . . . Chester Kensiski, Box 182, Terryville, Conn., would like to correspond with someone interested in Astronomy, between the ages of 13 and 18 . . . Clement Wendell, Box 427, Willcox, Ariz., would like to buy back issues of AMAZING STORIES. . .

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 134)

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

5, 9, 8, 7, 2, 1, 4, 10, 6, 3.

A MATTER OF CHOICE

1. d, 2. a, 3. b, 4. a, 5. c, 6. b, 7. a, 8. d, 9. d, 10. b.

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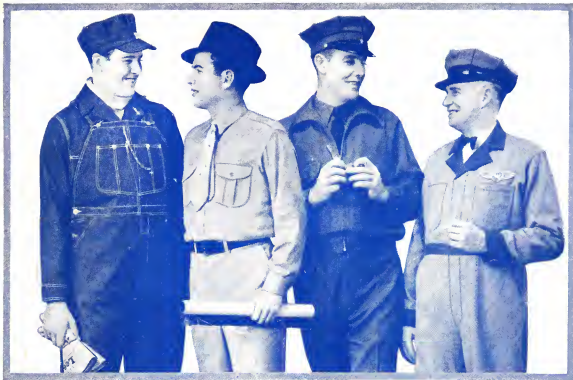
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